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# *The ART Quarterly*

PUBLISHED BY THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

*Edited by* W. R. VALENTINER *and* E. P. RICHARDSON

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THE ART QUARTERLY

SPRING, 1944



*Fig. 1. JOSE CLEMENTE OROZCO, Hidalgo  
Guadalajara, State Capitol*

## THE EARLY WORK OF OROZCO By J. A. THWAITES

### I. BEGINNINGS

IN all the discussion of the murals of Jose Clemente Orozco, he seems never to have been treated as the heir to a great tradition. But he is heir of a tradition unbroken since the broad-sheets of the fifteenth century in Italy and the Transalpine North. It runs from Brueghel to Daumier, from Bosch to George Grosz. Within this stream of art, subject matter plays a "direct" part as it does not elsewhere, for the forms themselves derive from it. These forms are didactic, not evocative. The emotion generated by their visual poetry is like a cannon charge driving one's feelings in its line of fire. In the wax studies Daumier made for his lawyer types you can see him load the forms with his commentary. They express the corrupt and greedy, smug and sly, by the very same distortions as give them plastic force.

Orozco, in taking over this tradition, found a problem which his precursors had no need to face. He was the first of the "direct" painters to become a muralist. In early drawings he had developed a style not unlike that of Grosz. Both painters emerged from social revolutions which had stopped midway. Each used his pencil as a scalpel on the human buzzards of his country. For this moral vivisection both formed a calligraphic style, as Hogarth had done in the eighteenth century. But then Orozco carried this manner to his first walls, in the *Ladies of Fashion* at *Preparatoria*, the National Preparatory School of Mexico. These paintings, compared with his drawings, are as an enlargement against a contact print. All the sensibility has gone. Color is trashy and unrelated to the line. And the coarse vigor of the line itself only makes caricature replace expression. Something is missing.

By the time the Mexican painter had started on these frescoes, the Cubists in Paris, following Seurat and Cézanne, had restored to contemporary art a formal base. They filled the lacuna which had halted mural painting since Tintoretto and had stultified Puvis de Chavannes. The influence of the Cubist movement on Orozco shows clearly in the over-lintel decorations of the *Preparatoria*. Their angular forms and metallic monochrome might have come straight from the Parisian painters. But the new values of Cubism were at the same time the old values of the Pre-Columbian art—sculpture to which, as Sr. Cardoza y Aragón points out,<sup>1</sup> Orozco from his childhood was exposed. It was on a reconciliation of these values that he based *The End of the Old Order* and to

some extent all the rest of his work on the *Preparatoria* walls, although there were other influences too: Spanish and High Renaissance.

Yet there was something missing still. It is true that the awing effect of the monumental values fits well enough with the painter's commentary on a collapsing world. But they do not derive *from* it: and the cool classicism of these forms does not allow them to be loaded with the passionate, satirical statements for which Orozco uses them. The result is esthetically a double exposure, rather like that which one feels when Goya uses the lacy drawing and rococo form, so suited to the *Caprichos*, for the agony and violence of the *Desastres de la Guerra*.

It remained to find a mode within which one could express a commentary and which yet would stand enlargement on a wall. The secret was concealed in the later paintings of Daumier but Orozco seems to have taken it from elsewhere. On his visits to the United States at the beginning of the last decade, he saw Expressionist painting. Always—perhaps necessarily—an eclectic, he grasped at once the significance of this other vision. It was not that Expressionism had been a "direct" art. That place was taken in Germany by the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. But the Expressionists, following Van Gogh and Gauguin, had sought a plastic means of rendering subject matter in itself non-visual. To that end they had exploited primitive art before Picasso did, but with an eye to its "magical" qualities. Finally, in the portraits of Oskar Kokoschka, the natural appearances were broken down into a rhythmic pattern. With this the painter built up a plastic equivalent for the exciting and mysterious humanity of the sitter. It was as though the subject had been X-rayed—but for something deeper than the bone structure. In Orozco's mural at Pomona there is a change perceptible in this direction. At Dartmouth College the transition is completed to a new manner.

For Orozco found that that pattern which could evoke secret humanity could just as well evoke human terror and violence. Forms based on African and Melanesian art would express satire and emotion as the classical forms would not. Yet they would stand enlargement and an architectural function where his calligraphic style had failed. In short, direct expressionism was possible and as a mural art. It could be transformed from an intimate expression of the human mystery into Orozco's great statement of social tragedy. When the Mexican painter found this solution he was nearly fifty years old.<sup>2</sup>



## II. THE STATE CAPITOL, GUADALAJARA

Orozco's murals on the staircase of the Capitol were not the beginning of the cycle, which began in the United States at Dartmouth and Pomona, but they hold the essence of his mature period—the best mural painting for three hundred years. No painter since Tintoretto has carried the architecture into his murals as it is carried here. The seer projects himself in imagination into the thrust and counter-thrust of the building. Thence he is drawn on into the corresponding thrusts of the painting, themselves imaginary.

In the Renaissance tradition this empathy was achieved as the eye followed from a real to a painted architecture, in perspectives. Here, the architectural space-forms and stresses echo back into the lines of the composition. The staircase, coming down on either side to the center landing, makes an inverted triangle. Then the lower flight opens out again like a fan. The inverted triangle becomes the torso and arm of Hidalgo, curving up into the vault (Fig. 1), and the opening fan of steps corresponds to the movement of the torch and flags (Fig. 2) sweeping the figures forward until it seems they will come cascading down the stairway. In the background space opens, but not in a Renaissance perspective which carries the objects away. Instead, it holds them in a space-continuum like that of Matisse or Klee, so that, curving, it can thrust them forward again. Behind Hidalgo, a flat sky gives the figures play; while in the left panel (Fig. 5) it moves up to a focus of light and aureoles and projects the heavy forms.

Like most of Orozco's painting, this panel has colors but not color.<sup>3</sup> It is basically *grisaille*, with only two color elements: the torch and the background. The cold red of this ground spreads from the center panel. To the right behind Hidalgo it is full of fragments and its chill glare is that of an explosion seen against clouds. To his left it rises to a silver luminosity. Meanwhile the torch crackles above the center group (Fig. 2), catching the dull red of the banners, whipping everything to life. For the rest, the center panel washes forward in a series of greys. In the triangle to the left, behind the stabbed man, grey deepens toward green. In the line of weapons, breaking from beneath the torch and flags, it rises toward blue. Yet where the grey is purest the form is most intense, in the livid bodies piled at the panel sill.

There are certain other colors in the composition: brick-red in Hidalgo's mask and hands; a woman's pink-wrapped leg; blue-and-white bayonets in the corner. But these are peculiar: they are separate entities outside the color



harmony. And with these outside colors comes a change in drawing, which breaks the convention within which the painter has been working hitherto. The bayonets are drawn descriptively. Hidalgo's face is a dry stereotype. The explanation of this shift in expression clearly is that here Orozco touches off associations, not of form but with the appearance of the object, necessary for his reference to the subject matter which remains unseen. This is steel painted by a man who has used it for others who have used it too. This priest-mask is a stereotype which to every Mexican means the War of Independence. The pink shirt, on the other hand, fails to support its break with the convention, either in color or in drawing.

The rest of the drawing develops in contrast to these outside fragments. Its essence can be seen in the arm and shoulder of the man with the machete (Fig. 3). In Orozco's earlier murals these forms would have been built and smoothed into a cylinder. They would have been impersonal, formal, calm. Now he paints in a series of curving strokes which, though taking their pattern from the splay of the muscles, actually splinter the masses and create a form not of volume but of feeling. This is a comment on motion-as-emotion, the thrust *and* its ferocity. A comment on the Revolution. It builds up Orozco's concept of the revolutionary world as the oval of a barouche-wheel, the line of a dress in Guys, builds up the world of Baudelaire. This is enforced by the head of the killer. The skull is a ball, held in space-tension. Hatching of cheek and brow carve out a head with the force of Schmidt-Rottluff. But every line is loaded to carry and convey the slow rage of the peasant tormented into violence. The victim provides a foil. The strokes which define the curving plane of his back have a slower movement. There is a laxer spiral in the stiffened arm. The whole figure has the curious gentleness of the moment of death by violence. The drawing is direct in the sense of Grosz' series on the first World War; but Expressionism gives Orozco the broad quality needed for a mural painting. For the smaller detail, such direct characterization would not do for it would be lost on the extension of the wall. Recognizing this, Orozco sums up the crowd as little heads rocketing away from the main figures. They are the classical masks of hatred, pain and despair which, passing through Expressionism, have taken on the psycho-physical effect of Negro or Esquimaux or Melanesian carving.

Before his problem could finally be solved, Orozco had to find a way to contain this direct Expressionism within the architecture of the composition, as that is contained within the space-forms and stresses of the building. His



*Fig. 2. JOSE CLEMENTE OROZCO, Social Struggle  
Guadalajara, State Capitol*



*Fig. 3. Detail of Figure 2*



*Fig. 4. JOSE CLEMENTE OROZCO, Carnival of Ideologies  
Guadalajara, State Capitol*



*Fig. 5. JOSE CLEMENTE OROZCO, Religious Phantasms and Militarism  
Guadalajara, State Capitol*



answer was to push his geometry on through the whole (Fig. 2). The great triangle here, made by Hidalgo's torch in its junction with the flags, is divided again into sub-triangles. And all these triangles are built up of others, again subordinate. The result of this strict geometry in Orozco's painting, just as in Maya or Wei sculpture, is controlled vitality. The observer's eye is unconfused, satisfied, at last delighted to encompass such diversity. This clarification is the antithesis of the geometrizing of a Diego Rivera or a Jean Charlot. There the figures seem to be cut out with nail scissors: woman bending, an ellipse; head, a circle; skirt, a triangle; and so on. Such trimming of illustrations, imposing arbitrary shapes on them, brings out no principle of form at all. On the other hand, Orozco's geometry is not the impersonal pattern of an Uccello. It is the vehicle of his forms, those forms which themselves come out of the comment he is making, the subject matter which he has in mind.

What is that unseen subject in the present painting? There is a phenomenon which recurs in history, yet of which we know almost nothing. It leaves few records and historians have given it only denunciation. You find it in the lost rebellions of Sparta, in the slave-risings of Spartacus and Cataline, in the peasant wars of the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. For a moment in time a leader moves the lowest, those who are hardly men. It will be a hundred or a thousand years before their need is understood; but for that moment they hope. At such a moment in modern history, Hidalgo gave his *grito de Dolores*. The opportunity was the War of Liberation from Spain. Levies came as though from the ground, as they had done in the risings of an earlier world. And again as in those risings, they sliced through their enemy, for the hope fought on their side. It infected the common soldier as it affected the common man. From Dolores the revolt spread over northern Mexico. But the historical logic of these popular movements decrees their end. Their allies turn, as the creoles turned on Hidalgo. The serfs riot and burn, as the Jacquerie did in France and the mestizos and Indians in San Miguel and Celaya and Guanajuato. The cult of the day pronounces anathemas—the Church excommunicated Hidalgo—and the believers fall away. At last the rulers close in with their armies as Calleja at the Bridge of Calderón. But the peasant revolt of Dolores was not drowned in time, like those earlier ones.

"At the end of the way," says H. B. Parkes (*History of Mexico*), it was the creoles who established Mexican Independence and assumed power; but the mestizos and the Indians had acquired traditions which they did not forget. . . . The Mexican War of Independence was a rehearsal for

the Revolution. . . . For more than a hundred years after the *Grito de Dolores* the history of Mexico was the history of a struggle to realize hopes first proclaimed by Miguel Hidalgo.

Such is the unseen content of Orozco's mural. Faces of Hidalgo's men lift out of the darkness of history for a moment under the torch of their leader and become the *agraristas* and workers of the Revolution. The same motifs are repeated. A leader is always betrayed. A killer is always slain. The violence is endless, at last senseless; cadavers heap the foreground. Still, there is the arc of the torch sweeping. There are the great lines of the composition. There is the movement forward; that blind sense of historic direction which for a hundred and thirty years has never quite left Mexico.

On the right stair wall of the Capitol, Orozco has painted his *Carnival of Ideologies* (Fig. 4). The explosion which seemed to hang in the air behind Hidalgo, rears up in lines of black and red. The figures are drawn in the same *grisaille* but reflect a tone of the background. Again there are few colors, none now dominant. Dark reds and browns and olive-greens are thrown up from the flaming grey. As before, parts of the drawing are outside the Expressionist convention, but this time as a foil to the rest, rather than for emphasis. Against the storm of satire are set drum and violins, drawn with the classicism of Vermeer or Derain. The composition relates simultaneously to the architecture and the painter's commentary. Its horizontals drop with the stair fall; diagonals, striking against them, create parallelograms of force. (That on the left, for example, of hammer, cross, faces and pointing arm.) Thus geometry states the ideological confusion: similarity of opponents and union of opposites; and at the same time gives the design coherence and continuity with the building.

This panel shows Orozco's satire as it is today. He is no longer concerned, like Grosz, to flay social degenerates: militarist, wealthy bitch or profiteer. His weapon is no longer objective analysis of jowls and rumps and baggy eyes, as it was in the *Ladies of Fashion*. For his whole comment is at once more subjective and more general. Most of the leaders of the past half-century are lampooned here, but impersonally. They are treated as he treats political insignia, as the symbols in which the political equation is expressed. The clenched fists of international communism, the clasped hands of the Popular Front, reappear from the early murals, but now as dummies. In the union of the swastika with the hammer and sickle, Orozco actually forecast the Soviet-Nazi Pact, that second Munich, which was to cost the peoples of the Soviet Union what the first cost Britain. The compromise and fear and failure of all in the



Tragic Decade are here. A masked Stalin prompts Díaz, Mexican figure for reaction. Zapata, their revolutionary symbol, hugs the fetishes of communism, nazism and clericalism, often kaleidoscoped in Mexican political ideas. Léon Blum appeals to communism and clericalism at once—the straddle of the *Front Populaire*. Mussolini appears (again prophetically) as the futile mountebank carried onward by a tide he does not understand. As these plastic symbols realize their values, the equation becomes plain. The confusion of the retreat before Nazism comes together as an esthetic whole. It is the concept of an artist whose stimulus is political life as for other artists it is personal or natural or philosophical life-forms. In this satire, Orozco is for painting what Bernard Shaw is for literature.

The drawing in this panel is lighter than the *Hidalgo*, for the comment is in terms of intellect and satire instead of action and passion. But just as it is still "direct" so also it is still expressionist. Look at the head of Mussolini. The mouth is not characterized. Its form is not objective development from nature. You feel it in your flesh—as when in Cocteau's film *Le Sang d'un Poète* a mouth opens, softly, in a man's forearm. Orozco drags out the oblong of the dictator's jaw, flattens the skull and bands the cheek with three white slashes. Then in contrast he sketches the ear delicately in, like some tiny parasite. All the rest of the drawing is shaped by this conceptual satire. Díaz is mottled into a shriveled apple of reaction. The masked Stalin forms a broken angle of moustache and jaw; heavy, muffled. An equally impersonal Roosevelt, in flaccid semicircles of white, makes the Latin's comment on Yankee meliorism. In the Zapata, carved like a war idol, Orozco picks out the inhuman fanaticism of revolution and holds it up between his fingers.

On the left wall (Fig. 5) the explosion empties away and the background fills with luminosity. As on a country evening, the sky is brilliant before light ends, the foreground is very black. But when the eye is adjusted it perceives the smoky greens in the cloaks and figures and warmer greens in the yellow-bellied snakes. The red cloak and cap-band of the faceless soldier glow in the darkness. All the colors are pools of shadow on which touches of white float like scum. The cross leans above, balanced on the diagonals of the composition.

The first of these diagonals follows the line of shadow from behind the skull, between cloak and candle, below the small cross to the horizon. The second runs up the cloak to the illuminated fold above and so onto the vaulting. As before there are counter-diagonals: snake, skull and sword below; above, the broken line of the crosses. And again, there is the parallelogram of force,

releasing a sense of vitality. But this time, it turns into a heavy drive, like troops marching in the rain.

What is this drive on which Orozco makes comment? It is the clericalism which came out of the War of Independence richer than before, more opposed to education and liberty, jealous of power. It is the Army, which had fought against Independence, yet at the end bestrode Mexico. For a century that union of forces remained. It brought corruption, intrigue and *pronunciamentos*: the snakes vomit bayonets into the center panel, where the workers struggle on below the torch of Hidalgo.

### III. THE UNIVERSITY OF GUADALAJARA

The murals in the University were painted before those of the Capitol, but—save for the dome—they follow them in the series as a whole. The main panel (Fig. 6) carries on the motif of the *Social Struggle* and at the same time complements the *Ideologies*. In this panel the upper mass of figures revolves as one: the form of a cylinder. Characteristically, this form is physical and emotional too: for as the cylinder curves there is a change in the individual figures. The rightmost (facing forward) is all slack rhythms and collapsed forms, like wet clothes on a line. In the second the drawing is flaccid still, but now the brush strokes follow the lifted arms. The eyes are discs, half-separate from the skull. Despair rises to frenzy. In the third figure, the ribcase cuts a hard triangle and the strokes beat upward steadily; while in the arms, muscle-forms replace the thick line of bone. The black-and-grey of the third head changes in the fourth to purest black, with white on cheek and mouth. These might be two furious stokers from O'Neill's *Hairy Ape*. Beyond them, the last figure completes the rise from despair to rebellion.

On the left, Orozco projects the leaders, the doctrinaires, again in a single compositional term, within which his commentary develops and the figures change. There it is the form described by the "wipe" on a windshield or on the movie screen. The great diagonal of the Union Boss from boot to saw tip, with the massive greybeard above, alone save the intellectuals half-wiped from the wall. The satire here is conceptual, as it was in the *Ideologies*. Each figure packs into itself a whole file of the pseudo-revolutionary drive. There is the union boss from Odets' *Waiting for Lefty*. ("Boys! Let's look at the reckud!") There is Marty, with knife and book, symbols of his murderous dogmatism, from *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The holy books of revolutionary determinism

are scattered everywhere. This, in the eyes of the great satirist, was the international leadership, intellectuals and organizers too, a group as futile as that of the *Carnival of Ideologies*.

The foreground figures close the composition, cupping an ellipse which hangs from the top corners of the panel and binds together wedge and cylinder. But to effect this composition Orozco is forced to make a switch in color. The arm and body of the glaring man must change from silver-grey, as the upper figures, to bronze, as the man with head bandaged. This cuts his forward reaching arm with a picture plane and drives the line of the ellipse across his body. The same forced composition marks the cylinder itself. Tying the bodies to the central mass there runs a horizontal break in tone. It ignores the forms and cuts the movement of the cylinder.

On the other hand, in this panel Orozco drives deeper his direct expressionism. The first effect is that the nudes are flayed; then—the contrasts are so gauged, the touches of white overpainting so used—they seem phosphorescent. Like all romantic art, Expressionism tends to center on the head. The profile of the limbless man is such a center in this panel. It is built up in angles: nose, chin, jaw-and-cheekline; white and black triangles of cheekbone and eyeshield; balanced by mouth and ear and the silver curve of the skull. It owes much to Ludwig Kirchner. But here each facet has the "directness" of a wrinkle of one of Daumier's lawyers or a sagging line of one of Lautrec's whores in its relation to the painter's commentary.

The limbless man is given a foil in the glaring one behind him. In this second figure the stress lies on the curves: skull, ear, eye and its hollow, even the beard; with mouth and cheek and nose as counterpoint. The flesh-painting here has wide strokes and lampblack shadows, against the hard rhythm of the other torso. Its whole effect is fear and sickness. The figure of the head-bandaged man is outside the convention in its almost academic drawing. It simply provides an architectural balance: the head as the lynch-pin of the panel, arm and fist anchoring it to the doorway.

Two side panels are *predelle* to this central one. In the first are a couple of work bosses with a soldier behind them. This panel goes back in attitude (not style) to Orozco's early period. It is particular satire, not the conceptual satire of the *Ideologies*. The result is the academic grotesque of a Paul Cadmus. In the other predella, two male nudes show grey on a ground of red, the color deep and cold behind them, silver and full of light above. In the foremost plane there lies the dead body of a child. The drawing is a contrast of ecstatic with



collapsed forms. In one nude, a kneeling figure, the brush sweeps in curves, marking out the hollow trunk and the muscles which are like a cape around his shoulders. These open, shaking forms carry an ecstasy of sorrow. Then Orozco paints the child with brush strokes that are small and dry. The forms are folded like the paper of a disused fan. Only the skull is round, modeled with the hollow intensity of a mask by Ensor.

Last comes the Dome (Fig. 7). Here there is an abrupt change in drawing. The upright figures which stand so portentously are composed in blocks of solid color, each spread on flat and not built up from a color harmony. Round the blocks and around the figures there runs an unvarying heavy line. The result is a picture-puzzle of brown, red, green and blue pieces, each of which (if one wished to play a game) could be replaced by any other. Only the hanged man has something of the touching, almost physical effect of direct Expressionist drawing. The forms of his torso, rose-silver on the breast, cascade like darkening green water off his sides. But one figure is not enough to mitigate the rest. As architectural color, the fresco performs a prodigy; by sheer dead-weight of paint, it drags down the dome into a flat ceiling.<sup>4</sup>

What is the reason for this remarkable debacle? First, while Orozco can use colors in his chromatic drawing, as soon as he lets them take the upper hand his weakness as a colorist is plain. Second, the whole of the painter's vision comes out of his comment on society, the unseen subject matter of all his works. This is the antithesis of the incarnated Types which he has illustrated here. "The Rebel," "The Constructor," "The Dialectician," "The Investigator"; these have the same value as "Science" or "Peace" or "Justice" in the public art of the Victorians; and Orozco gets the same value out of them. The dome is a negative demonstration of what Orozco is. He is a graphic artist. He is a direct artist. When he forgets that he becomes, unfortunately, an academician.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** The writer is indebted to the work of three distinguished Mexican critics: Señores Carlos Mérida, Justino Fernández and Luís Cardoza y Aragón. Wherever he has differed specifically from them, he has endeavored to quote their views.

<sup>1</sup> Luís Cardoza y Aragón, *La Nube y el Reloj*, University of Mexico Press, 1940.

<sup>2</sup> For the contrary view, cf. Cardoza y Aragón, *op. cit.*: "From his first works we observe the profound unity of his being, that security which has guided him almost with the character of predestination. We cannot, in effect, prefer his late frescoes to his first ones, for the best examples of his talent . . . have always the same true greatness. He is always himself and always unique." (Trans.)

<sup>3</sup> For the contrary view, cf. Cardoza y Aragón, *op. cit.*: "Color . . . is not the complement of his other virtues, but an additional virtue within the final esthetic achievement." (Trans.)

<sup>4</sup> For the contrary opinion, cf. Carlos Mérida, *Orozco's Frescoes in Guadalajara*, Frances Toor Studios, Mexico, 1940: "The tonal scale of the colors in the Dome produces a sense of elevation and space, suited to the optical dynamics of the figures."



*Fig. 6. JOSE CLEMENTE OROZCO, Fake Science and the Human Problem  
University of Guadalajara, Main Panel*

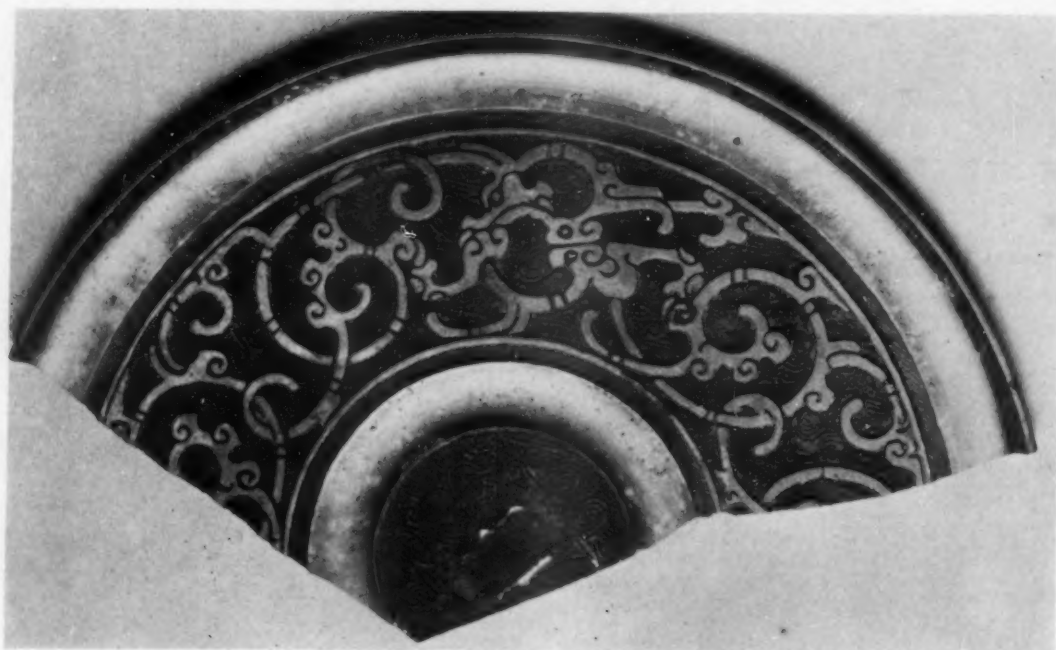


*Fig. 7. JOSE CLEMENTE OROZCO, Dome  
University of Guadalajara*





*Fig. 1. LATE CHOU, Chinese Bronze Mirror,  
Magic Side (5 $\frac{7}{8}$ " diam.,  $\frac{1}{24}$ " thick)  
Author's Collection*



*Fig. 2. LATE CHOU MIRROR,  
Burnished Bands Forming PI Symbol (detail)  
Author's Collection*

## THE CHINESE BRONZE MIRROR: TWO INSTRUMENTS IN ONE<sup>1, 2</sup> By JAMES MARSHALL PLUMER

THE major art of bronze casting, one of the great manifestations of ancient Chinese culture, included the casting of mirrors. Mirror making, far from being a separate "minor art" within the art of bronze casting, was a specialized development. As such we know it to have flourished from the latter part of the Chou Dynasty, perhaps from the 5th century B.C., for a millenium and a half, through the T'ang Dynasty, or roughly until the 10th century A.D. Previous to this remarkable known period of continuous quality production, was undoubtedly a long tradition of ritual reflecting implements (e.g., metal mirrors and reflecting basins) of which little is known. Moreover, since the T'ang Dynasty, manufacture has continued even to the present day. While the story of the mirror may thus be as long as the story of Chinese culture, our discussion is devoted principally to the indicated millenium and a half, with especial emphasis on pre-Han examples. These early examples, variously labeled "Warring States," "Late Chou," "Eastern Chou," "Huai," or "Ch'in," we shall refer to as "Late Chou" and consider as dating up to 206 B.C. (Fig. 1). They exhibit so remarkable a synthesis of artists' technical accomplishments and religious knowledge that by analogy with Siennese paintings, they might well be termed the mirror "primitives." In examining the mirrors we shall not be interested in them as material objects only, but rather as documents of whole culture. We would look at them with the eyes of the original makers and users. And in so doing we would demonstrate that the Chinese mirror as, on the one hand, an efficient reflector of natural light, and on the other hand an efficient symbol of the Light Supernatural.

On such a basis the practical mirror which was also a ritual implement was able to maintain a live tradition through the rise and fall of dynasties, through the coming and going of religions. Undebased, it outlasted all the ritual implements of the great bronze age and spanned all history from Chou to Sung.

### ALLOY<sup>3</sup>

The metallic composition of the mirrors is a "white bronze" similar to the scientifically developed metal, speculum. A typical analysis of a Late Chou mirror showed: copper, 72.1%; tin 26.2%; lead, 1.4%; (total 99.7%). A slight change in formula to include approximately 5% lead is noted in analyses made of Han (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) mirrors, and associated with this

change are certain modifications in ornament that indicate different casting methods. Indicated is a general use of the stone mould from about the beginning of the Han Dynasty.

No trace of surface mercury has yet been found, persistent statements of modern scholars<sup>4</sup> and numerous references to its use in Chinese literature notwithstanding. In view of the remarkable reflecting power of the alloy itself, not to mention the volatile character of mercury, such use would have been neither necessary nor practical. The association on both practical and symbolic levels of reference of mercury with mirrors is, however, unassailable with respect to cleansing an old mirror. Witness the following condensed passage from the *Chin P'ing Mei*:

Here is the polisher of mirrors. . . . My mirror needs polishing. It is very tarnished. . . . My mirrors, the large one and the two smaller ones and the square one I use for dressing . . . the old man . . . brought out his quicksilver and in a very short time polished them till they shone again. . . . The mirror was like pure clear water.<sup>5</sup>

Mercury as a surfacing for bronze mirrors we would expect to see no sooner than the proverbial rubies in *sang-de-boeuf* glaze.

#### CASTING

Heir to the bronze craft secrets of a thousand years, at very least, the mirror maker of Late Chou was familiar with many methods of casting and the variations and refinements in his methods must have been numerous. The most precise mirror casting method and one of which Chinese literature speaks often, was the "lost-wax" process whereby an earthen mould was formed about a wax model. The wax, heated and permitted to escape through a vent, was replaced by molten bronze. Undoubtedly some mirrors were cast this way.

The use of 2-piece or open earthen moulds, in which the handle and the symbolic ornaments were provided for by an ingenious system of superimposed stamps, has been described in detail by Orvar Karlbeck.<sup>6</sup> This seems to have been the standard method employed for the Late Chou group.

Of special interest is the process which employed a 2-piece stone mould, an exceptional specimen of which we illustrate (Fig. 5).<sup>7</sup> As a hint at the remote antiquity of this process, we may note that in Japan the supposed ancestor of mirror-makers was Ishikoridome, or "The Stone Cutter."<sup>8</sup> In China actual evidence of its survival within the craft into the Sung Dynasty (960-1280 A.D.) is seen in a bronze mirror of that period<sup>9</sup> bearing the mark of a Huchou (Chekiang) stone-cutter. In our opinion the stone mould was the kind most



frequently employed during the Han and San-Kuo (220-280 A.D.) periods.

The characteristic bas-relief ornament of T'ang mirrors and the prevalence of certain types suggest a process that involved the modeling of a *patrix* or master model from which many moulds could be made. An important ingredient in all these methods was the leisure inherent in the guild system.

It seems likely that only in post-T'ang times was a practice made of using cast originals including actual Han and T'ang specimens as models for moulds. Impressions made by this method were poor, being progressively less sharp.<sup>10</sup>

The fineness of casting varies even as the original mirrors at any given period must have varied in price for a market including buyers of varying means. Typical, however, is extraordinary precision in casting and the absence of any indication of the location of the "gates" or points of entry of the molten metal. A rough surface is not necessarily proof of a second grade mirror. On the contrary, parts of some mirrors were left rough, as cast, to provide a cohesive ground for painted or *appliqué* decoration, or for diffusion of light. The thinness of some specimens is remarkable. One Late Chou mirror in the writer's possession at its thinnest point measures less than a 32nd of an inch.

## FINISHING

All mirrors required some finishing of the cold metal after casting, for even the crudest required a polished reflecting surface. Close examination reveals clear evidence of numerous methods of abrasion, tooling, and burnishing.

In one Late Chou example<sup>11</sup> alone we have observed five different surface effects: as cast and rubbed with abrasive (Fig. 7a); ground straight with abrasive (a similar effect to filing) (Fig. 7c); ground with abrasive while being mechanically spun (Fig. 7b); and burnished on obverse with no abrasive scratches.

A Han example<sup>12</sup> exhibits use of two tools: a gouging tool with curved blade of 1/8th inch radius (Fig. 8a); and a spinning abrasive tool perhaps on the principle of the bow or the spiral string drill such as Chinese carpenters use today (Fig. 8b).

Excessive polishing of the reflecting surface sometimes results in a technical accident, the so-called "magic mirror." In this an uneven surface, caused by resiliency of the thinner parts during polishing, results in deflection of rays from the surface. This deflection follows the design as cast on the reverse—and a diffused image thereof appears within the area of light reflected from the polished side. Although generally known as "magic mirror," we would

emphasize that this type is essentially a technical freak (if not a demonstration of relativity!)—and would indicate below that in another sense *every* mirror is a magic mirror.

## DESIGN

The design of the mirror was always twofold. It was, at the same time, secular and religious. The functional reflecting face was balanced, on the reverse, by symbolic ornament. Its designer catered alike to bodily needs and spiritual requirements. He designed two instruments in one, meeting specifications which called for physical reflection and metaphysical contemplation.<sup>13</sup>

In the *Tao Te Ching*, a text contemporary with the Late Chou mirrors, we read in the translation by Waley: "He who having used the outer-light can return to the inner-light is thereby preserved from all harm." The meaning hangs on the difference between *kuang*, literally "light" or "rays," and *ming*, "Light" or "intelligence," both of which continually recur in Han mirror inscriptions. Appropriately, we may remark here that it was preoccupation with the outer light, or the reflection of the physical self, that proved the undoing of Narcissus.

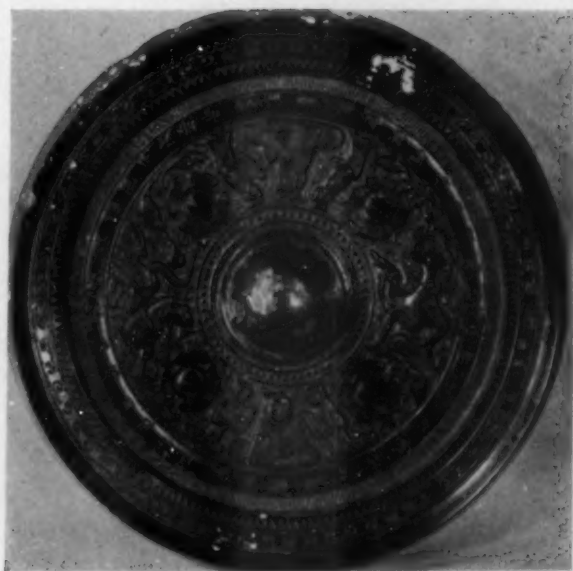
It is not as easy as might seem to consider the plain polished face as only an "efficient reflector." And it is unfortunate, perhaps, that our earliest representation of the Chinese mirror in painting, the Ku K'ai Chih scroll in the British Museum, *appears* to record only its use as a practical instrument of the boudoir.<sup>14</sup> We would balance that with a representation of the magical use of a mirror in an episode of the Last Judgement, wherein the character of a butcher and his wife is reflected (Fig. 12). As they kneel before the Judge, the magic mirror shows them to have been takers of life.

The mirror in the "queen's girdle" mentioned in the *Tso Chuan*,<sup>15</sup> circa 400 B.C. (perhaps our earliest reference in Chinese literature to a metal mirror) was surely as much for ritual as for practical purposes. This statement springs from a gift to us by a family maid-servant in China, of two mirrors which she had worn in her girdle as a bride.<sup>16</sup> We immediately call to mind the mirror as an attribute of fertility goddesses in other cultures, e.g., a yakshi of Bhutesar, India.<sup>17</sup> Not unrelated to the foregoing is the use of the mirror, as in Rajput paintings, wherein the lover sees not his own reflection but rather that of the beloved. Even Lin Yu Tang boasts, in one of his popular books, "I have never been able to look at my face in the mirror without a feeling of creeping shame."





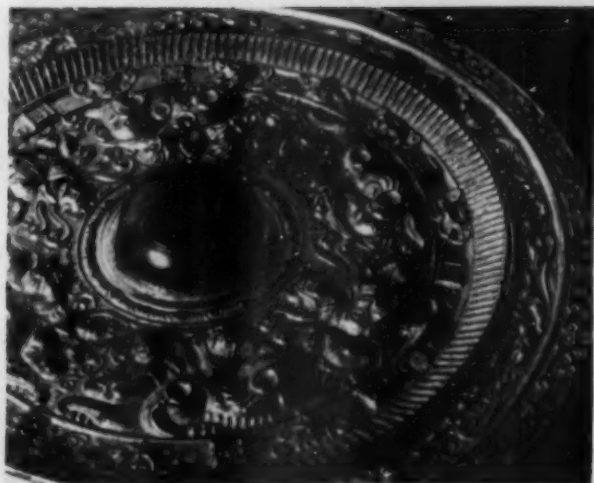
*Fig. 3. T'ANG DYNASTY, Mirror in Lotus Form  
Washington, D. C., Freer Gallery of Art*



*Fig. 4. SAN-KUO PERIOD,  
Mirror with Cosmic Ornament  
The Detroit Institute of Arts*



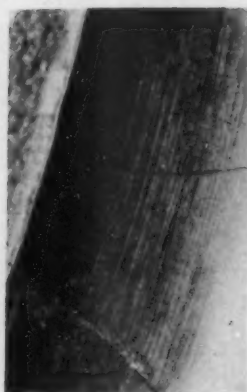
*Fig. 5. CIRCA 2ND CENTURY, A.D., Stone Mould (lower half)  
New York, C. T. Loo Collection*



*Fig. 6. SIX DYNASTY PERIOD, Gilt Bronze Mirror  
New York, C. T. Loo Collection*



*Fig. 7a*

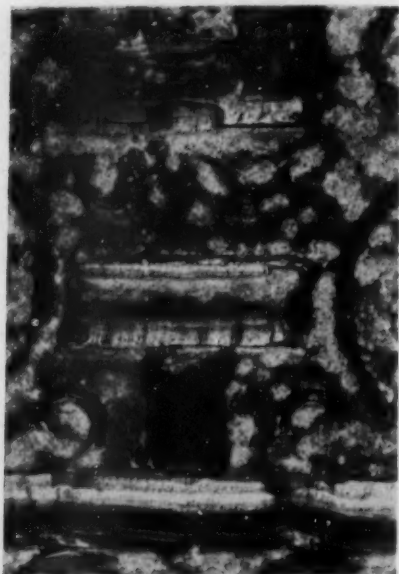


*Fig. 7b*



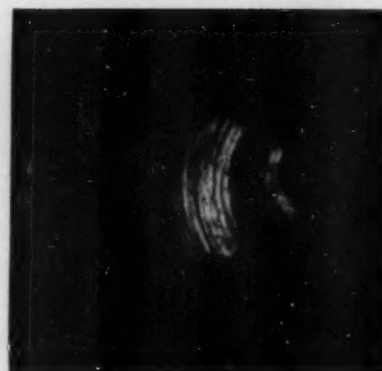
*Fig. 7c*

*Figs. 7a, 7b, 7c. LATE CHOU MIRROR, Surface Effects  
(enlarged details)  
Oakland, California, R. K. Stockwell Collection*

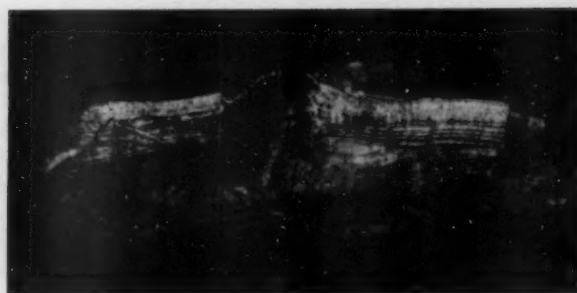


*Fig. 8a*

*Figs. 8a, 8b. HAN,  
Tool Marks (original)  
Author's Collection*



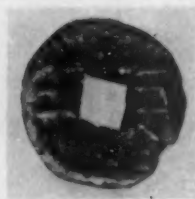
*Fig. 8b*



*Fig. 8c. HAN,  
Tool Marks (experimental, on same specimen)  
Author's Collection*



*Fig. 9. LATE CHOU MIRROR,  
Sun Symbol Type  
Canton, China,  
J. Javrotsky Collection*



*Fig. 10.  
HAN OR EARLIER,  
Clay Spirit-  
Money  
(Half Tael)  
Author's  
Collection*



*Fig. 11. LATE CHOU MIRROR,  
Square-in-Circle Type  
Author's Collection*

## SYMBOLISM OF PLAN

Significant it is that the drawing of the basic plan of the Chinese mirror (a circle about a central point) was coincidentally a geometric ideograph for the sun. This may be accepted as evidence that the original craftsman (and by this we refer to a prehistoric man) had uppermost in his mind the designing of a sun symbol. That it was cast in bronze rather than drawn in the dust or painted on a pot was quite incidental to the original purpose. The point is best seen in the earliest and simplest Late Chou specimens, e.g., that in the Javrotsky collection (Fig. 9), the design of which is an enlarged equivalent of the Shang character for sun.

The possible developments and extensions of this basic plan carried out on the reverse side of the mirror are infinite. By adding an inner circle, for instance, the craftsman formed the hollow disc symbol for Heaven familiar in the glass or jade *pi* (Fig. 1).<sup>18</sup>

By drawing a hollow square within the circle, the craftsman made a symbol for Heaven and Earth (Fig. 11). Our family maid-servant previously referred to wore square-in-circle cash<sup>19</sup> as well as mirrors in her girdle when a bride. The use of this form as wedding talisman previous to its use as mere cash is as certain as it is that the wedding rite itself preceded harlotry. This symbol, no less appropriate for funerals, is found in clay spirit-money (Fig. 10) contemporaneous with our early mirrors and in present day paper spirit-money scattered at funerals. Heaven and Earth have been symbolized in many ways—the square-in-circle is the equivalent of the more familiar *yang-and-yin*.

The square mirror—exceptional though known, particularly in T'ang—was a symbol of the Earth.<sup>20</sup> Whatever the developments, the central point was always symbolically the metaphysical axis of the Universe, which is understood to pass through both Heaven and Earth. Thus the ancient Chinese with mirror in hand held a symbol as catholic as the Christian or pre-Christian cross (Fig. 13).

Circular mirrors with ornament laid out on principle radii, varying in number, for example: 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, etc., were symbols as clearly understood when made as the four-radial square-in-circle just described. The chief elements in the Late Chou period were always given a high polish so that the whole basic symbol shone (Fig. 2).

A study of the formal symbolism in the Late Chou mirrors alone would lead deep into the science of metaphysics. Cosmic mountains<sup>21</sup> and World trees, sun and moon, *svastika* and *sauvastika*, indeed the marriage of Heaven and



Earth are indelibly cast in sacred bronze awaiting recognition by the perceptive mind. We hint here only at the possibilities. The symbolism rooted in the circular plan may be specifically solar or more broadly cosmic in which case the center or the knob itself represents the sun. It is not by chance that many mirrors, lacking only a needle, possess a perfect design for a mariner's compass.<sup>22</sup> (Signs of the four quarters and of the zodiac are frequent embellishments.) Nor is it fortuitous that complete designs—Han types come to mind—often bear resemblance to the Tibetan *mandala*, the *stupa*, or the Saivite *linga-yoni*. Nor is it remarkable that a Hopi Indian, a Chief of the Sun Clan, once discussed Chinese mirrors intelligently with us without ever having seen one.

Scholars have noted the similarities in the design on the reverse side of Han mirrors and on Chinese sundials;<sup>23</sup> and the solar significance of the reflecting surface is seen in the hundreds of mirrors, face out, in formal arrangement, built into the traditionally T'ang pagodas at Kuan-ning, Manchuria (Fig. 14). Even today in China small glass mirrors are used as protective solar talismen over doorways.

The lotus-flower and the more rarely found lotus-leaf forms are merely variations of the simple circular plan. Their Buddhist use in no way compromises the basic symbolism, for the lotus is also a symbol of the Universe (Fig. 3).<sup>24</sup>

A perfect synthesis of solar and lotus symbolism is realized in an extraordinary cosmic cluster of nine T'ang and Tempyo mirrors suspended directly over the great Kwannon image in the Hokkedo Sangwatsudo, in Nara, Japan (Fig. 15). In this, the large central mirror as well as the arrangement of the whole cluster is lotus-formed, thus presenting a Universe within a Universe. The solar rays which are seen to bind these two Worlds together are symbolically none other than the spiritual rays or threads by which the Buddha draws all souls to himself.

Iconographically, as discovered through actual metal examples sealed in Chinese images, the heart of Buddha is a mirror—and who would suppose it to be otherwise with the heart of Christ? Indeed, if the symbolism be true, it will be found applicable in any religion. Thus the mirror in the coffin<sup>25</sup> or the mirror suspended in the exact center of a vaulted grave<sup>26</sup> is not to be thought of as literally "giving light," but in the Biblical sense that "God is Light, and in Him is no Darkness at all."

## SYMBOLISM OF ORNAMENT

The informal ornament, no less than the formal plan, is inseparable from the cosmic symbolism. Truly the ancient craftsman not only worked as technician but also, as Dr. Coomaraswamy puts it, "performed a priestly function." Even though the craftsman might have ranked no higher in religion than a novice—and this we do not know—he was never a superficial "decorator" for his work was always informative. Nothing more nor less than ideographs were his ornaments. First in importance amongst the animal forms, through all the periods, is that king of supernatural creatures, the Dragon. The frequent label, "mythological beast" is libel when applied to symbol of Omnipresent Deity. At the cardinal point he is used as device for East, opposite the Tiger of the West: and in this arrangement they are symbols of Supernatural *versus* Natural, and of Life *versus* Death. Similarly the Tortoise-and-Snake or Black Warrior and the "Phoenix," *feng-huang* or Red Bird were opposing devices for North and South, and contrasting symbols of Darkness and Light, or of Profane and Sacred union in love. Returning to the Dragon, we may remark that he is so closely identified with the heavens that he is often represented as part dragon and part cloud (Fig. 16a and b). Frequently and appropriately, we find him framed by the two concentric circles by which, symbolically, Heaven is defined (Fig. 2).

The Dragon is found in some Late Chou examples so contorted in arrangement as to form a bird in silhouette.<sup>27</sup> This ornamental marriage of two forms is a symbolic one as well, forecasting all the latter day compositions of dragon and phoenix which often represent literally the marriage of the Emperor and the Empress.

During the Han Dynasty we find many sorts of birds and animals, with no sharp line between the natural and supernatural, which is to be expected of a people who also drew no line between history and myth. Thus we discover the tiger with or without tufted tail, with or without wings, sometimes with horns and sometimes with a human face (cousins to the leonine *sardula* and griffin) (Fig. 17). The early human types are usually hairy and often winged too. We find them supplicating or attempting to appease dragons and rhinocerosi. A bird may be seen teasing a fox (Fig. 18). In this we see a hint of contemporaneous folklore. Any folk would understand the motif, its inner content surely revolving about the concept of the spirit making fun of the flesh. A tiger and deer (both winged) are found shyly flirting and (remembering a modern Chinese observation that these opposing pairs are always

male and female) it occurs to us that here is a precise iconographical parallel to *Siva* and *Parvati* (of whom, in Indian art, these beasts are often symbols) (Fig. 19).

If our first impression is that the makers of these pictorial symbols must have been hampered by the rigidity of the geometric limits, we should remember that within these limits his imagination was allowed the whole gamut from Heaven to Earth. To illustrate the point one has only to compare the dragon symbol on any mirror with that found in the dictionary.

Anthropomorphic motives were especially popular during the 3rd century A.D., and the mirrors of this time, e.g., the Detroit *Shang Fang* specimen, give us a rare glimpse of the art of that little known period, the San-Kuo (Fig. 4). The predominant characters are Tung Wang Kung and Hsi Wang Mu, King Father of the East and Queen Mother of the West. We find their quiet repose and the piety of their bowing attendants as memorable as the wild spirit of the striding tiger and the prancing dragon. While we may see a typical Oriental contrast in these symbols, of action in the animal and inaction in the man, at the same time we must note that either the creature, supernaturally winged, or Deity in the shape of man, perfectly exemplifies a blend of Body and Spirit.

Though surviving, Six Dynasty mirrors appear to be rare, and strangely so in view of the great activity in casting bronze that prevalent Buddhist images suggest; the gap is surely in our knowledge rather than in the tradition (Fig. 6). By T'ang, mirrors come again into their own. It is then that the familiar "late Hellenistic" grapes and birds and flowers and bees and butterflies and beasts in high relief appear (Fig. 3). These "naturalistic" motifs, as they have been called, are each and every one readable, to Chinese at least, as lovers' symbols—and they are used as garlands for the Supernal Sun upon a Celestial plan that is ever there. No lad or lass of T'ang supposed that the Buddha's sermons against desire precluded love. For both, if faithful and having faith, could see each other's image in the symbolic heart of their Lord.

### INSCRIPTIONS

Inscriptions which are conspicuously absent in Late Chou and T'ang may be pictured as creeping into mirror designs as an adjunct of the ornament in late pre-Han or early Han years. It almost seems as if they were introduced for the benefit of the literate who were unable to read the symbols. And it may fairly be said that translation of them without reference to the metaphysical elements of the designs of which they are part is of little avail. Here is a





*Fig. 12. MING OR CH'ING DYNASTY, Folk Painting  
Author's Collection*



*Fig. 13. FROM LATE CHOU MIRROR,  
Cruciform Symbol, Oakland, California,  
R. K. Stockwell Collection*



*Fig. 14. T'ANG ORIGINALS and /or REPLACEMENTS,  
Mirrors over Images  
Kuan-ning, Manchuria, West Pagoda*



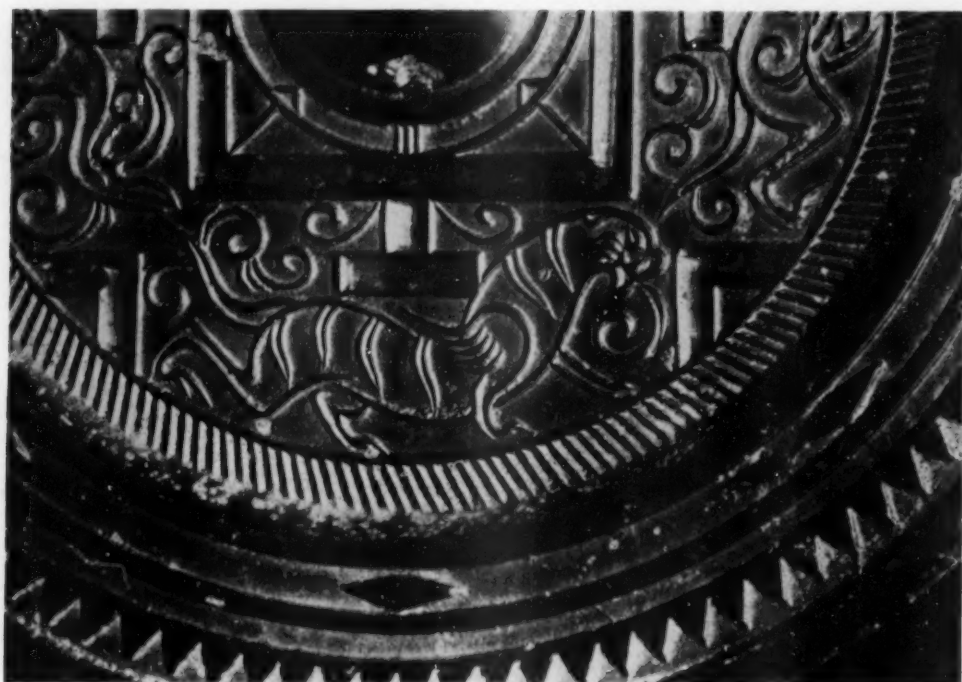
*Fig. 15. EIGHTH CENTURY,  
Mirror Cluster on Ceiling  
Nara, Japan, Hokkedo Sanguatsudo*



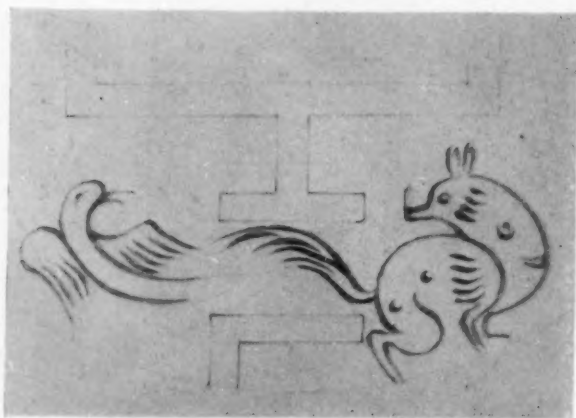
*Fig. 16a. AFTER LATE CHOU MIRROR DETAIL,  
Dragon-and-Cloud Symbol  
Author's Collection*



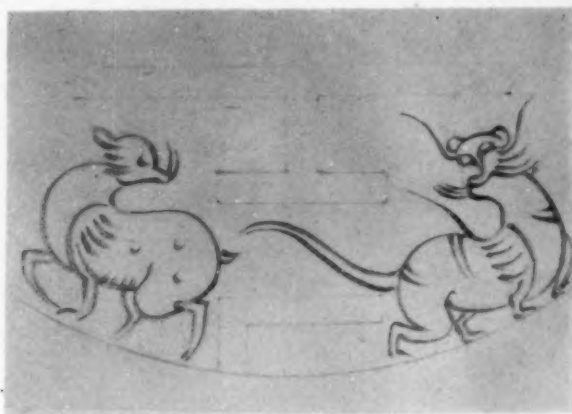
*Fig. 16b. AFTER LATE CHOU MIRROR DETAIL,  
Dragon-and-Cloud Symbol  
Oakland, California, R. K. Stockwell Collection*



*Fig. 17. HAN MIRROR, Tiger of the West (detail), Author's Collection*



*Fig. 18. AFTER HAN MIRROR DETAIL,  
Bird and Fox Symbols, Author's Collection*



*Fig. 19. AFTER HAN MIRROR DETAIL,  
Deer and Tiger Symbols, Author's Collection*

chapter of Han and post-Han philosophy that has interested Chinese scholars more than any other aspect of the mirrors. As demonstration let us consider one of the commonest and simplest inscriptions: *Chien jih erh kuang: T'ien hsia ta ming*, which Karlgren translates literally:

"When you see the light of the sun, the world is very bright."<sup>28</sup>

The thing is really a rebus, the first half of which should be spoken while looking at the reflecting surface, as follows:

"See [here] the light of the Sun . . ."

The second half, said while looking at the symbolic reverse side would read:

"[And here] the World becomes entirely intelligible."

One half of the couplet deals with appearances, the other with reality. They are as different as James Whitcomb Riley and Walt Whitman. It would be remarkable indeed to find any Chinese mirror inscription lacking hidden content.

#### PATINA

The patina of connoisseurship is responsible for the appearance of many mirrors whose surface effects differ both from the original fresh metallic brightness and the alluring mineral patina often formed during burial. A typical effect is a smooth dull sheen of one or several hues, e.g., pewter-color, dark green or black. Such effects are the result of constant handling or, rather fondling. For these are objects of art that were never labeled, "Do not touch." They were hoarded or treasured or loved or revered according to the character of their owner whose intimacy with them was not a thing of intellect alone, not only eye, but also touch. There comes to mind the smooth fore-paw of a British bronze guardian lion in front of the Hongkong Shanghai Bank on The Bund in Shanghai, worn smooth by the hands of passing people. Mostly, those who stroke it are simple peasant folk who have come to the new metropolis from the countryside and their touch (even of so profane an object) may fairly be considered an act of piety. So too, with the handling of mirrors. Even the modern Chinese of archaeological inclinations believes in the sanctity of graves from which, however roundabout the way or however long ago, most of the ancient mirrors have come. Some examples may never have been buried, but rather handed down through family collections, and a family tradition in China is well nigh as sacred as that of the grave. One certain instance of the preservation of Chinese mirrors in one collection from the T'ang dynasty to the present day cannot be overlooked—that of the *Sho-so-in*, temple treasury



of the To-dai-ji, in Nara. Doubtless they bear the fingerprints of priests. In any case, the patina of connoisseurship is a human thing.

The patina of excavation is another thing. Technical analyses have shown us that the glistening crystals clearly seen under an ordinary magnifying glass are evidence of return from metallic to mineral state. The natural processes involved have produced many marvelous results which, thanks to the patient laboratory research of others, we may label accurately. Thus, to put it simply, that which was speculum is now red cuprous oxide, blue azurite, green malachite, whitish tin oxide, and so forth. In mirrors freshly excavated these colors are often of startling brilliance and have rightly been admired by Western and Chinese connoisseurs alike. In an interesting experiment we have placed mineralized fragments of ancient Chinese mirrors upon a full-color reproduction of an oil painting by Van Gogh<sup>29</sup> with the result that the natural bits of green and blue became momentarily lost. Here were aesthetic equivalents. And thus mirror patina was shown to possess the identical sensational appeal of the oil painter's most brilliant pigments. In view of what is to follow on color symbolism, it may be well to say here that a Chinese nickname for such incrustations on old bronze is *Yang kuei-fei tu*, "earth à la *Yang Kuei-fei*," a famous concubine of the T'ang dynasty. The implication is that such brilliant colors are of erotic appeal, and are to be appreciated by the eye alone on a profane or sensual level of reference. Color and sensuality in Chinese are indeed synonymous.<sup>30</sup>

#### ORIGINAL COLOR

Colors in metal are undoubtedly the basic original colors in mirrors. Previously we have noted as many as five "kinds"<sup>31</sup> of surface texture on one mirror differing in accordance with technical methods of finishing the cast metal. The craftsmen must have been sensitive to the subtlest of effects possible in a single alloy in the same way as the Sung painters were sensitive to the possibilities of a single ink. Surely this subtle variety in "kind" or "quality" of effect is as important as the color of the spectrum in the fourth of Hsieh Ho's Six Canons: "Application of color appropriate to the character (or sort)." Thus in our earliest mirrors, as we have noted above, the two concentric bands which form the symbol for Heaven are so burnished as to present a more shining appearance than other portions of the ornament (Fig. 2). The "color" so used was no arbitrary choice of the craftsman but rather a requirement inherent in the symbol.

Applied metals provided an extension of the possibilities in metallic color. Comparatively rare examples possess rich ornamentation such as gilding, or gold and silver inlay. Glass and semi-precious stones were also set into mirrors. Such embellishments can hardly have been designed for costly effect only, as in modern jewelry, but were certainly used to develop the ornament with respect to meaning. Precious material was used to emphasize precious point.

Applied pigments, supplementary to polished areas, are now known to have been used by the ancient mirror craftsmen. Certain mirrors that were once considered second-rate because of roughness and apparently weak composition of the geometric elements are now to be understood as designed to hold pigments. Critics including ourselves had judged the frame after the picture was gone—a common archaeological mistake. At least two precious examples of these painted mirrors survive in good condition.<sup>32</sup> Traces of original applied pigment may well have remained, unnoticed, on many others. Flat bright formal colors were used and for a brief time at least the arts of painting and mirror casting were wedded in a single implement. Parenthetically we may remark that an entire group of mirrors<sup>33</sup> datable near the beginning of Han, bears between two symbolic bands that are always polished, cloud and dragon ornament that is always rough. It seems possible that a transparent coating was used to bring the ornament to life even as glaze does to rough ceramic ornament.

### COLOR SYMBOLISM

We need not suppose that color was used with less precision or purpose than the ornament or the geometric plan. Color, indeed, whether a matter of applied pigment or reflected light, or even if only implied in the nomenclature of a motif, was an integrated part of the whole symbolic design.

The four corners of the earth, so clearly represented by a square in Late Chou mirrors, are often labeled, as it were, during Han by the following familiar devices (listed in usual Chinese order): East, West, South and North: *blue* dragon, *white* tiger, *red* bird and *black* warrior (tortoise-and-snake). There is color symbolism in these beasts' names even if they happen to be cast in metal of a single hue.

Opposed even as East and West are the *blue* and *white* of the dragon and tiger emblems. The contrast is one of color *versus* non-color. As South and North are opposed, so are the *red* and *black* of the bird and tortoise emblems. The contrast is one of light *versus* darkness. These opposites possess an inner

meaning, which may be interpreted as follows: *Blue* as a color (*sê*) represents the Worldly; *white* lacking all color—or suggestion of the world—represents the Heavenly. *Red* indicates Heavenly Light, and *black*, the powers of Darkness. The colors amplify meanings already stated in the animal symbolism.

Let us consider *red* as the conventional color for the sun. It is the traditional color for the Chinese bride's wedding dress. When the bridegroom, symbolically *yang*, the Sun, weds the bride, symbolically *yin*, the Earth, *red* proclaims the Heavenly character of the union. Now death can also be considered a sacred union<sup>34</sup>—and a *red* covering is even today to be seen cast over the coffin in Chinese funeral processions. The symbolic use of *red* in weddings and funerals parallels the use of the symbol of the hollow square-in-circle in both weddings and funerals.

Some mirrors which we have seen, rather than the usual animals of the four quarters, have animals all of one type: dragons, birds and tigers respectively. We suggest as a clue to the meaning the idea that the morning, the noonday, and the evening sun, regardless of position in the sky, manifest themselves in all directions. We have never seen a similar fourfold use of the *black* warrior. Nor are we likely to find such a symbol (fourfold *black*, or Universal Darkness) as ornament for an instrument of light.

## CONCLUSION

Orientalists are by no means unanimous in recognizing inherent symbolism in every Chinese mirror. Yet no Oriental, reared to his own tradition, could ever have supposed it otherwise. Despite the authoritative stand of Wilhelm<sup>35</sup> and Yetts, and forgetting that all hunting once was ritual, a European scholar has written us that a hunting scene on a mirror proves it to have been purely secular. Similarly, an American scholar in correspondence with us suggests that the basic circular form "may be evidence only of a functional answer to a technical problem." Even Umehara, to whom we are so indebted, suggests that the circular form may be due to Scythian influence, and remarks that if Han designs symbolized ideas, those of the Warring States and Ch'in, on the contrary, were nothing but simple animal designs.<sup>36</sup>

Of all the symbols of humanity's many religions—and it is common to every one—the solar symbol may most easily be recognized as being derived, not from a country to the East or West or South or North of any man, but as coming direct from Above to all. There is no intention, here, to stir up controversy, for, if the Truth be known, there can be none. We have missed our



goal if we seem only to have defended the fact that all mirrors were symbolic implements as well as practical. What we now understand, and call upon our friends and enemies alike to see, is that the symbolism is true.

In conclusion we shall allow an unknown Chinese, long dead, though his words still live in bronze, to say the last word about the mirror:

*In its reflection one can read one's heart  
And also see the image of one's face.<sup>27</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Special acknowledgments in connection with this study are due to the following: Prof. Langdon Warner for constant guidance; Laurance C. S. Sickman, Esq., companion hunter in the *bu-tungs* of Peking and Loyang; Orvar Karlbeck, Esq., whose pioneer Huai culture investigations and the building up of the great Lagrelius and Hallwyl mirror collections entitle him to lasting recognition; the late Robert W. Swallow of Peking and Kaifeng who with a Chinese scholar's twinkle in his eye never hesitated to mix fact and folklore; the late Dr. Florence Ayscough Mac Nair who warned us never to expect Chinese literature to be without mystic content; to Directors of the Fogg Museum, Harvard University, whose facilities were ever at my disposal; and finally to the Executive Board of the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies, University of Michigan, for a Faculty Research Grant by means of which it has been possible to complete this study. Photographs Nos. 8a and 8b, courtesy of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D. C.; Nos. 8c and 6, courtesy Fogg Museum; Nos. 14 and 15, courtesy Langdon Warner; No. 3, courtesy The Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

<sup>2</sup> No pretense has been made of presenting a complete or even well rounded bibliography, but one item unavailable to us as this MS. goes to press, and deserving of special mention is the recent *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, Stockholm, devoted entirely to the "Huai style" or Late Chou mirrors. Reference to this work is recommended, particularly to those interested in a subject which we have omitted, stylistic analysis.

<sup>3</sup> Much of the material of a technical nature especially under the headings of ALLOY and PATINA we owe to separate painstaking and exhaustive studies undertaken at the Fogg Museum by Dr. Rutherford John Gettens and Victor C. Mooradian and based principally on mirrors collected by the writer in China.

<sup>4</sup> See Ardelia Ripley Hall, "The Wu Ti Mirrors," *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*, 1/2 Heft, 1934, p. 15, and Malcolm F. Farley, "Some Mirrors of Supposed pre-Han Date," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, V, No. 1 (Jan. 1940), 83.

<sup>5</sup> Translation by Clement Egerton, *The Golden Lotus*, III, 68.

<sup>6</sup> Oscar (Orvar) Karlbeck, "Notes on Some Early Chinese Bronze Mirrors," *China Journal of Science and Arts*, Vol. IV, No. 1, Jan. 1926.

<sup>7</sup> The specimen, lower half only, is of soap-stone or steatite, carved in the reverse impression of a typical late Han "Shang Fang" mirror. There is evidence to suggest that the piece was actually used, and possibly rejected on account of a small crack. We have made two reasonably clear castings, one in plastic, the other in dentist's alloy, from a plaster of Paris reproduction of this old mould.

<sup>8</sup> W. G. Aston, *Shinto, the Way of the Gods*, pp. 184-5.

<sup>9</sup> R. K. Stockwell collection, Oakland, California; not illustrated.

<sup>10</sup> See Milan Rupert and O. J. Todd, *Chinese Bronze Mirrors*, Peiping, 1935, pl. XIX, No. 206 and pl. XXI, No. 124, for Han types attributed to Sung and Tang.

<sup>11</sup> Specimen in R. K. Stockwell collection similar to Robert W. Swallow, *Ancient Chinese Bronze Mirrors*, Henry Vetch, Peiping, 1937, Fig. 559; and to Sueji Umehara, *Shina-Kodo Saikwa or Selected Relics of Ancient Chinese Bronzes from Collections in Europe and America*, Vol. IV (or Part II, Vol. I), Osaka, 1933, pl. 10.

<sup>12</sup> A specimen forwarded to the F. B. I. for examination to determine age and nature of tool marks.

<sup>13</sup> For the several attitudes in Western scholarship with respect to symbolic or magic use *versus* practical use, see Ardelia Ripley Hall, "The Early Significance of Chinese Mirrors," *J. A. O. S.*, LV, No. 2, 187-8.

<sup>14</sup> See Otto Fischer, *Die Kunst Indiens, Chinas, und Japans*, p. 328, for detail showing two mirrors in use in a boudoir, an illustration of the sixth text of the *Admonitions of the Instructress*, by Chang Hua of the 3rd century A. D. The text is translated by A. Waley in *An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting*, p. 56, as follows: "Men and women know how to adorn their persons; but few know how to embellish their souls." In view of the pointed division of the text, it is worth noting that the symbolic as well as the reflecting sides of the mirror have been depicted.

- <sup>13</sup> Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 182.
- <sup>14</sup> At Shen-nü-miao, Kiangsu.
- <sup>15</sup> Ludwig Bachhofer, *Early Indian Sculpture*, Vol. II, pl. 92 (right).
- <sup>16</sup> A symbol, like any other, recognizable by the user wherever found.
- <sup>17</sup> For more than 2,000 years the square-in-circle, complete with open center spirit-path, was the typical form of the Chinese coin. Not till modern times was sacred symbol replaced by profane portrait.
- <sup>18</sup> For specimen, from collection of Monsieur H. Lambert, see Swallow, *op. cit.*, Fig. 550, and note quotation, p. 14: "... the square ones, shaped after the earth, were the worst." Cf. mundane use of "square one . . . for dressing" already mentioned. See also Umehara, *op. cit.*, Vol. V (or Vol. II, Part II), pl. 57a and b.
- <sup>19</sup> Contrary to the view of Professor Percival Yetts; see *The Cull Chinese Bronzes*, p. 88, we accept the traditional Chinese nomenclature of *Shan-tz'u* (mountain character) versus the Western "T motif" and would equate, symbolically, the splendid Late Chou example which he illustrates, *ibid.*, pl. XXIV, with the T'ang specimen in the *Sho-so-in* reproduced in Otto Fischer, *Die Kunst Indiens, Chinas und Japans*, p. 414, on the basis that they depict a 5-peaked cosmic world in different terms: the former being more abstract, the latter more naturalistic. The *shan* character in Chinese literature, incidentally, is nothing less than an abstraction of a mountain, and as often as not is used symbolically.
- <sup>20</sup> See Swallow, *op. cit.*, frontispiece, and Umehara, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pl. 55.
- <sup>21</sup> For brilliant discussion of a single Han-type, see Yetts, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-165 and pls. XXXI-IV-V, wherein he declares it to be not only "sun-dial and cosmic mirror" but a "compendium of cosmology" and "compendium of astrology" as well. See also the briefer note by William C. White and P. M. Millman, "An Ancient Chinese Sun-Dial" in the *Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada*, November, 1938, pp. 417-30.
- <sup>22</sup> See Swallow, *op. cit.*, Figs. 20 and 9.
- <sup>23</sup> One of the burial usages described by J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, II, 399.
- <sup>24</sup> As illustrated by Berthold Laufer, in *Chinese Pottery of the Han Dynasty*, Fig. 55.
- <sup>25</sup> See Swallow, *op. cit.*, Fig. 530 or the well-known Boston example, Umehara, *op. cit.*, pl. 31.
- <sup>26</sup> Karlgren, "Early Chinese Mirror Inscriptions," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, Stockholm, No. 6, p. 22, no. 59.
- <sup>27</sup> *Still-Life*, Pears, 1888-9, Dresden.
- <sup>28</sup> See D. MacGillivray, *Dictionary of Chinese*, Presbyterian Mission Press, Shanghai, 1911, "SE: color, quality, kind; sexual pleasure."
- <sup>29</sup> See secondary meaning of SE in foregoing note: "quality, kind," and note that the Chinese traditionally speak of "the five colors."
- <sup>30</sup> One in the Moriya collection, reproduced in color in *Kokka*, No. 584, May 1939, and one formerly in the possession of Mr. C. T. Loo and now in the Winthrop collection at Harvard University.
- <sup>31</sup> See Swallow, *op. cit.*, Fig. 46 and Umehara, *op. cit.*, pls. 33 and 34.
- <sup>32</sup> I.e., a marriage of the worldly soul with the other-worldly Spirit.
- <sup>33</sup> Richard Wilhelm in *A Short History of Chinese Civilization*, p. 42, states: "They were employed chiefly for purposes of magic . . ."
- <sup>34</sup> Sueji Umehara, *L'Etude sur le Miroir Antérieur à la Dynastie des Han*, Kyoto, 1935, Chap. VIII, concluding paragraphs.
- <sup>35</sup> From an inscription on a Six Dynasty mirror, Swallow, *op. cit.*, Fig. 56; Swallow's translation makes the dual aspect of the mirror crystal clear.

# THE ICONOGRAPHY OF DÜRER'S "KNOTS" AND LEONARDO'S "CONCATENATION"

By ANANDA K. COOMARASWAMY

"La forma universal di questo nodo credo ch'io vidi"—Dante

*Paradiso* XXXIII. 91.

Λύειν δ'έστιν ἀγνοοῦντας τὸν δεσμόν—Aristotle

*Metaphysics* III. 1. 2.

AMONG Albrecht Dürer's wood-engravings is the series of *Sechs Knoten*; the design (Fig. 1) fills a circle and consists of a very complicated unbroken white line pattern on a black ground; the main pattern is echoed in four small corner pieces and in several cases Dürer's own name is engraved in the central dark circle from which the main design expands.<sup>1</sup> The usual view is acceptable, that Dürer's *Knots* are variations of a well-known engraving on copper of a similar medallion (Fig. 2), the design of which is commonly attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, and in the center of which there appear the words *Academia Leonardi Vinci*. Goldscheider<sup>2</sup> sees in this "*fantasia dei vinci*" probably a "hieroglyphic signature," and he quotes Vasari, who says that "he [Leonardo] spent much time in making a regular design of a series of knots so that the cord may be traced from one end to the other, the whole filling a round space. There is a fine engraving of this most difficult design, and in the middle are the words *Leonardus Vinci Academia*." Goldscheider remarks that there is "a play on the words *vincire* (to fether, to lace, to knot) and Vinci," and rather naïvely adds that interlacing patterns were not invented for the first time by Leonardo.

A. M. Hind<sup>3</sup> says that "the prints were probably engraved by Leonardo with the definite aim of serving as patterns of a kind of decorative puzzle for artists of various crafts. Instances of similar knot design occur throughout Leonardo's Mss. . . . The connection of Vinci, the town of his birth, with *vinco* (willow, osier) which would be commonly used for plaiting baskets and the like in various interlaced patterns may have suggested the device, and some by-play to *vinci* in the sense of *vincoli* (bonds or fetters) may have been intended. The latter sense falls into line with the title of 'Knoten' (or Knots) given by Dürer himself to six woodcuts which he made after the present series." Mr. Hind also observes that amongst Dürer's variations is "the inner



line used in representing the 'cords,' making them more closely resemble metal."

G. d'Adda<sup>4</sup> says that Dürer's *Knots* have been called embroidery designs, but are really lace patterns ("veritable patrons de passementerie"); in any case *Knoten* suggests a textile application. The designs have also been called "dedali" or "labyrinths"; but in d'Adda's view this is inexact, because here the lines both touch and are superposed on one another, which is not the case in true labyrinths. Amongst other books d'Adda cites in his Bibliography is one by Balthazar Sylvius (Du Bois), published in 1554 and entitled (in Latin): *A Little Book of Geometrical-Designs, commonly termed 'Moorish' . . . very useful to Painters, Goldsmiths, Weavers, Damasceners . . . and also to Needle-workers*. From all this it is clear that it must have seemed to Dürer's contemporaries that his *Knots* were such as could be employed in a great variety of techniques; and that their likeness to Moorish arabesques was generally recognized.

There is more to be said for the designations "dedalus" and "labyrinth" than d'Adda supposed. It is true that in what he calls the "true labyrinth" the lines are never superposed; but that is inevitable, because the old constructed labyrinths are laid out on plane surfaces so as to form a "maze" through which one can actually walk until the center is reached, while the representations, whether rock carvings or drawings, are merely replicas of the constructed forms. These constructed forms are of great antiquity; they may be referred to a Megalithic culture, and occur as stone alinements in Finland and Sweden.<sup>5</sup> The famous medieval examples are inlaid on cathedral floors; there were examples at Amiens, St. Quentin, and Rheims; and of those still existing, the most notable is that of Chartres (Fig. 3), with a pathway some six hundred and fifty feet in length, leading round and about until the center is reached. In Hahnloser's words, "Gleichzeitig mit de Ruhme des Dädalus erhebt die Gotik auch seinen 'Grundriss,' die durchbrochene Spirale, zu symbolischer Deutung." W. R. Lethaby quotes Didron, who says that "the whole device was deemed to be indicative of the complicated folds of sin by which man is surrounded, and how impossible it would be to extricate himself from them except through the assisting hand of Providence." In the case of a labyrinth at St. Omer, temples, animals and towns were depicted on the pathway and the Temple of Jerusalem in the center. Lethaby says that the French labyrinths "appear to have been called *la lieue* or *Chemin de Jerusalem*; they were placed at the west end of the nave and people made a pilgrimage on their knees,

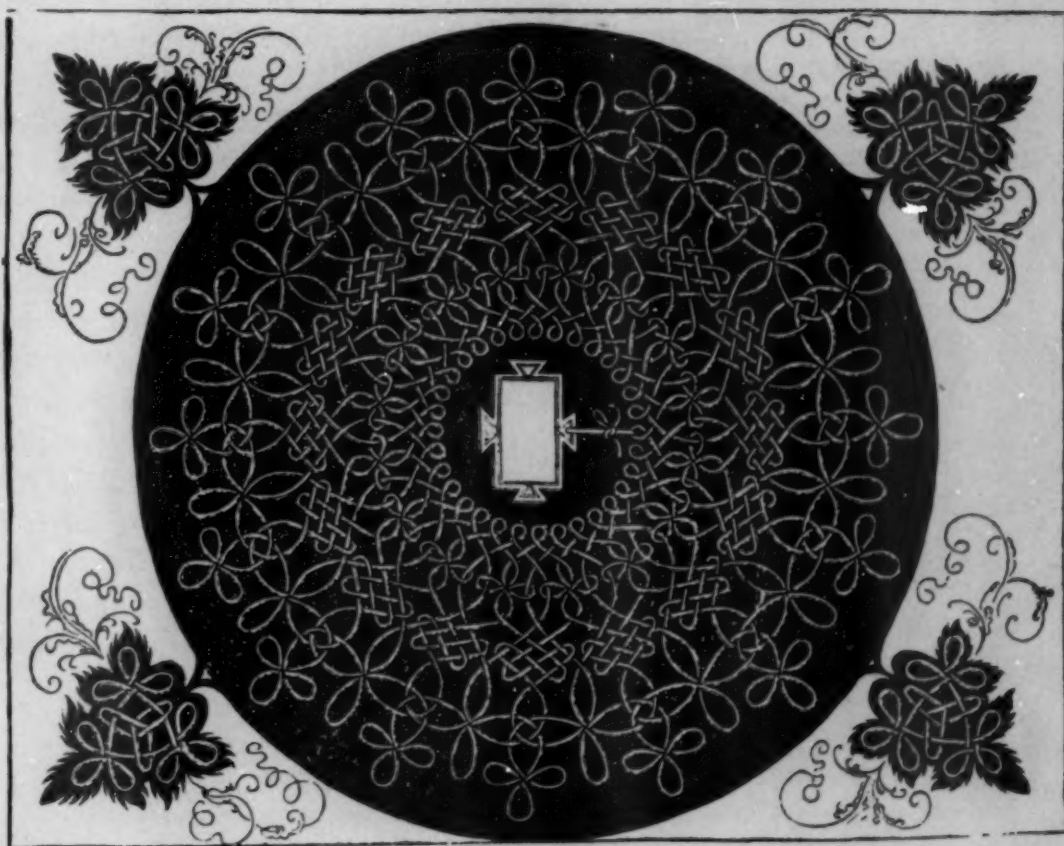


Fig. 1. One of Dürer's "Sechs Knoten"

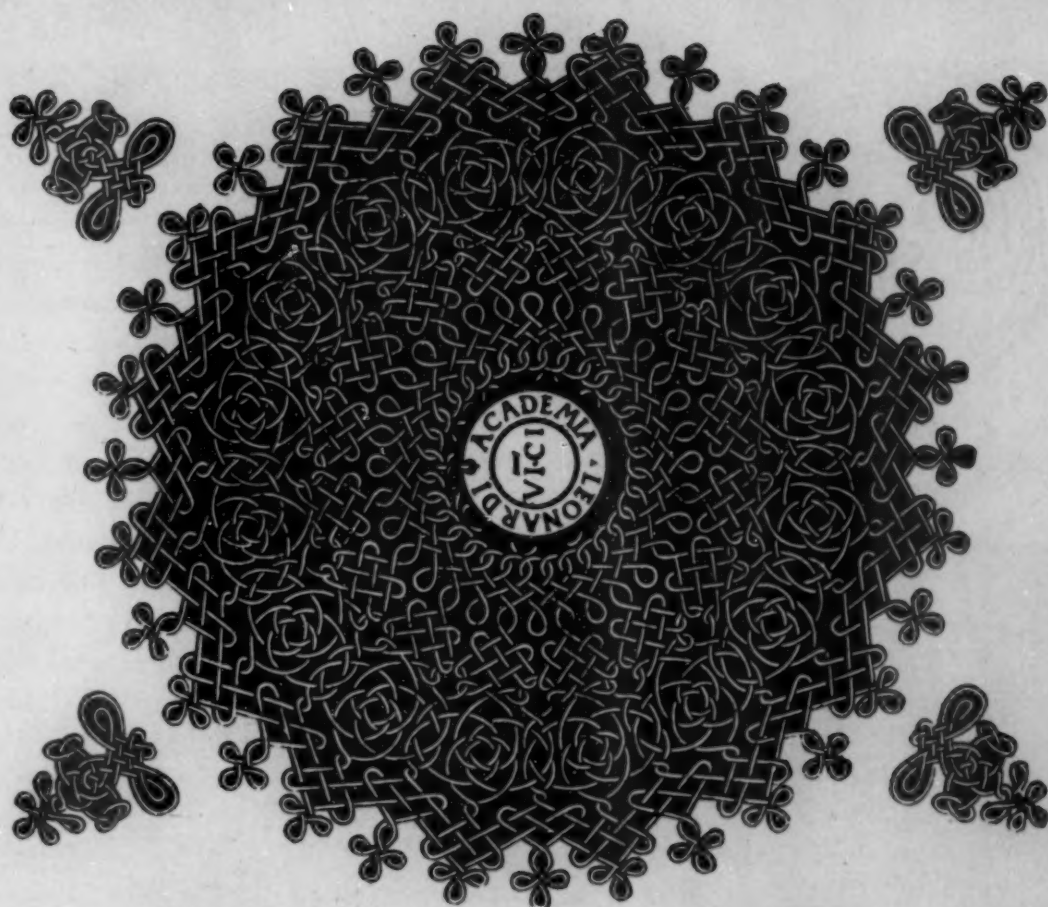


Fig. 2. Leonardo's "Concatenation"



Fig. 3. LABYRINTH, Chartres  
After Hahnloser, Abb. 40

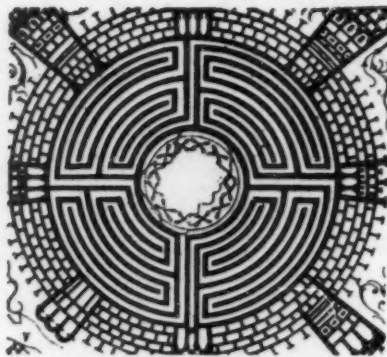


Fig. 4. LABYRINTH,  
Roman Pavement, Verdes  
After Hahnloser, Abb. 39

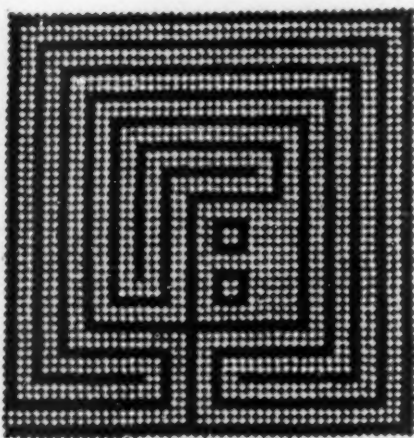


Fig. 5. LABYRINTH,  
Basket-work, Ceylon  
Coomaraswamy,  
"Mediaeval Sinhalese Art,"  
Fig. 143

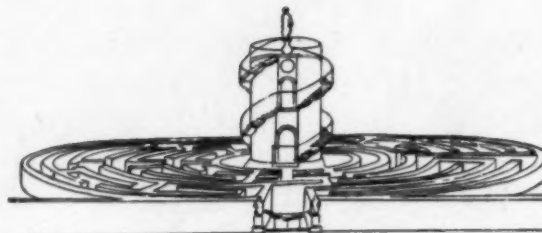


Fig. 6. LABYRINTH AND SPIRAL TOWER,  
Villa Pisani, Strâ  
After W. Born, "Gazette des Beaux-Arts,"  
1943, p. 248



Fig. 7.  
Design from Mimbres Bowl  
After E. L. Watson,  
"Art and Archaeology"



Fig. 8.  
Design from Mimbres Bowl  
After E. L. Watson,  
"Art and Archaeology"



following the pathway to the center, which is said to have been called *Sancta Ecclesia* or *Ciel*."<sup>6</sup> Of numerous English examples cut in turf it is of great interest that one is called by the name of "Troy Town."<sup>7</sup> The Italian examples of pavement labyrinths at Ravenna, Rome, Pavia, etc., are descendants, through Roman pavements (Fig. 4) and gems, from the representations of the labyrinth of Dedalus which occur on Cretan coins. The motive survives in Oriental Folk Art (Fig. 5). Villard de Honnecourt's drawing<sup>8</sup> is identical with the labyrinth that appears on the Hereford map of Crete, inscribed *Labarintus id est domus Dealli*; and the one at Amiens was inscribed *Maison de Dedalus*. At Pavia the Minotaur is represented at the vortex in the form of a centaur. As Lethaby remarks, the exact form of the original designs is preserved throughout the Middle Ages, but "when the root of tradition was broken away from at the Renaissance, all this was altered, and mazes became inventions, every one different from the others—spiders' webs<sup>9</sup> of enticing false paths." We reproduce here one late form, interesting because the center is occupied by a high tower with a spiral stairway and surmounted by a statue (Fig. 6); whoever ascended this tower would be able to look down upon the maze through which he had already passed, taking in the whole at one glance.

We have discussed the "dedali and labyrinths" at some length in order to show that it is their tradition that really survives in Leonardo's and Dürer's *Knots*. The best evidence for this is to be found in the fact that while the names of Leonardo and Dürer are inscribed in the centers of their designs, at Amiens the center of the labyrinth was occupied by an effigy of the architect of the cathedral, and similarly in some other instances identified by inscriptions. This implies as Hahnloser says, an apotheosis of the architect, by assimilation to Daedalus, the original constructor and the only mythical architect whose name was familiar to the builders of the Middle Ages. There can be little doubt that the octagonal form of the pedestal of which the traces remain at Chartres, bore the significance of a regeneration as in the case of fonts. In any case the affiliation and analogy of the knots to labyrinths is clearly established by the placing of their authors' names or images at the center.

That the lines of the *Knots* are superposed and intersect involves no difference in principle, but represents a translation of the idea of the maze into three-dimensional and textile terms. The significance of Leonardo's "decorative puzzle"—which, from an Oriental viewpoint must be called a *maṇḍala*—will only be realized if it is regarded as the plane projection of a construction upon which we are looking down from above. So seen, the pattern breaks

up into three parts, that of the dark ground of the earth (with angle ornaments indicative of the four directions), that of a knotted tissue that broadens out below and is contracted above, and that of a center and summit that would be white if one were looking at it from below but in the figure itself is dark because the dark ground shows through it.

Leonardo's concatenation is a map of the universe in the precise terms of Dante's lines:

Co-created was order and inwrought with the substances; and those were the summit in the universe wherein pure act was produced:

Pure potentiality held the lowest place; and in the midst potentiality with act strung such a withy as shall never be unwound

("strinse . . . tal vime, che giammai non si divima," *Paradiso* XXIX. 31-6), where the metaphor (of basket-work) is of just that technique which A. M. Hind quite independently suggests as the probable source of Leonardo's design. Almost identical with Dante's are the terms in which the Indian sacrificer imitates the Preparation of the Three Worlds for inhabitation, viz., "as a man throws (Webster, sense 2, twists or braids) strand upon strand (*guṇe guṇam*), even so he throws world upon world, for firmness and that there may be no slackening" (*Taittirīya Saṁhitā* VII. 2.4.2). *Guṇa*, "strand," or "thread," is also "quality" or "virtue," notably with reference to the "three worlds," terrestrial, atmospheric and celestial, mentioned above, and of which the "qualities" are respectively dark-potential (*tāmasik*), variegated-activated (*rājasik*) and white-essential (*sāttvik*).

Nor must we overlook that other line of Dante's in which he speaks of God "who draws the earth and unites it to himself" ("questi la terra in se stringe adune," *Paradiso* I. 117) or that in which he speaks of seeing all at once "the universal form of this knot" ("nodo," *Paradiso* XXXIII. 91), which "if our fingers are unable to unravel, it is from long neglect" (*ibid.*, XXVIII 58-60).<sup>10</sup>

Leonardo's *Concatenation* is a geometrical realization of this "universal form." He must have known Dante, and could have taken from him the suggestion for his cryptogram. But there is every reason to believe that Leonardo, like so many other Renaissance scholars, was versed in the Neo-Platonic esoteric tradition, and that he may have been an initiate, familiar with the "mysteries" of the crafts.<sup>11</sup> It is much more likely, then, that Dante and Leonardo both are making use of the old and traditional symbolism of weaving and embroidery. In connection with the traces of this tradition in Swiss folk art

Titus Burckhardt remarks: "Ornaments in the form of a knot, which are widely distributed in nomad art, comprise an especially suggestive symbolism, based on the fact that the different parts of the knot are opposed to one another, at the same time that they are united by the continuity of the string. The knot resolves for whoever understands the principle of knotting of which the invention is, so to say, itself a symbol of the hidden principles of things."<sup>12</sup>

Dante's *questi la terra in se stringe* goes back through intermediate sources (cf. John 12:32) to Plato's "golden cord" (*Laws*, 644) that we ought by all means to hold on to if we would be rightly governed, and not distracted by the pulls of contrary passions; and so to Homer's "golden chain" (*Iliad* 8.18 ff.) with which Zeus could draw all things to himself and in which Plato (*Theatetus*, 153) rightly saw a solar power. It is related, too, that when Zeus was ordering all things, he consulted Night, and asked her "how all things might be both one and divided, he was bidden wrap aether around the world and tie up the bundle with the 'golden cord'."<sup>13</sup> It is in almost the same words that Marsilio Ficino (whom Leonardo must have known) says that "as in us the spirit is the bond of Soul and body, so the light is the bond of the universe (*vinculum universi*)."<sup>14</sup> The clew survives in William Blake's:

I give you the end of a golden string,  
Only wind it into a ball,  
It will lead you in at Heaven's Gate  
Built in Jerusalem's wall.

Sylvius' words, "quas vulgo Maurusias vocant," cited above (in translation), not only remind us that our "knots" are, so to speak "arabesques,"<sup>15</sup> but also that the symbolism of the thread of life (familiar, too, in connection with the Greek Moirai and Scandinavian Norns) recurs in Islamic contexts; analogous to Blake's, for example are Rūmī's lines:

He gave me the end of a thread—a thread full  
of mischief and guile—  
"Pull," he said, "that I may pull; and break it  
not in the pulling."<sup>16</sup>

Indian sources for the symbolism of sewing and weaving and the corresponding "thread-spirit" (*sūtrātman*) doctrine are even more abundant and explicit. William Crooke records that "at a place in Gilgit there is said to be a golden chain hanging down to earth from the sky. Any persons suspected of wrongdoing or falsehood were taken to the place and forced to hold the chain while they swore that they were innocent or that their statements were true," and as



he adds "this suggests the Homeric reference (*Iliad* 8.18 ff.), and the *Aurea Catena Homeri*, which was handed down through the Neo-Platonists to the alchemists of the Middle Ages."<sup>17</sup>

This is a remarkable parallel, but one from which no argument for an "influence" could be deduced. For to go back to the eighth century B.C. (and still earlier texts could be cited), we are told that "the Sun is the fastening to which these worlds are linked by means of the quarters. . . . He strings (*samā-vayate*, √ *ve*, 'weave,' 'braid,' 'string,' present also in 'web' and It. *vinci*, *vime*) these worlds to himself by means of a thread (*sūtra*, √ *siv*, 'sew'), the thread of the Gale (*vāyu*).<sup>18</sup> Verily, he who knows that thread, and the Inner Controller who from within controls this and the other world and all beings, he knows Brahma, he knows the Gods, the Vedas, Being, Self, and everything";<sup>19</sup> for "by the Breath (Life) he connects (*saṃtanoti*, √ *tan*, Gk. *teino*) these worlds."<sup>20</sup> Better known is the text of the *Bhagavad Gītā* VII. 7: "All this universe is strung (*protam*, √ *ve* as before) on Me, like rows of gems on thread" (*sūtra*).

From the standpoint of the apotheosized architect, or that of the Demiurge to whom he is assimilated, the pattern of Dürer's and Leonardo's knots is that indeed of a circumambient ornament, nimbus or investiture. It is in these senses that Hermes Trismegistos, describing the power of the solar Demiurge who draws (*'elkōn*) all things to himself, says that "he is set up in the midst and wears the cosmos as a wreath about him," and again, that the sensible Cosmos and all things therein "are woven like a garment" (*quasi vestimentum contexta*) by the Intelligible Cosmos.<sup>21</sup>

And now with reference to the minor knots or dependent loops which are formed in this endless cord, and are made apparent by the chiaroscuro as of a white warp on which a black woof is cross woven; these *nodi della vita* are the definitions of individual existences, determined by their names; and as such they are to be regarded favorably from the existential and unfavorably from the essential point of view. For, in the first place, "the cord (*tanti*, √ *tan*, extend) in his (the Breath's, Life's) word (*vāc*, here = *logos*), and the knots (*dāma* = Gk. *desmós*) are names; and so with his word as the cord and names as knots all this universe is tied-up."<sup>22</sup> "All transformation begins from the word, and is a matter of naming";<sup>23</sup> "everything here is held by name."<sup>24</sup> Writing quite independently on "Concatenation," Professor William Savery has remarked that "the chain of beings has strange loops!"<sup>25</sup>

The giving of names by the Great Denominator is the primary act of creation.<sup>26</sup> Hence the importance of "christening," Skr. *nāmakarman*; for example,

the new-born Agni complains that he is as yet nameless, and so "not freed from the evil," i.e., not really an existent; and hence "one should give a name," or more than one name, to a boy that is born, "for one thereby frees him from the evil," i.e., from mere non-entity.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, one *ties* on an amulet or bracelet with the prayer: "May I abide firm as a rock. . . . Man is the gem, Breath (or Life) the thread, Food the knot (*granthi*); that knot I knot, desiring food, the charm against death. May I attain the whole of my life, even old age,"<sup>28</sup> etc.

On the other hand all determinations or knots are bonds from which one could wish to be freed rather than remain forever "all tied up in knots." One would be released from all those "knots (*granthi*) of the heart," which we should now call "complexes" and of which the ego-complex (*ahaṃkāra*, *abhimāna*, Philo's *oīēsis*) is the tightest and the hardest to be undone.<sup>29</sup> The concept of liberty, in Vedic contexts, is repeatedly stated positively in terms of "motion at will" and negatively in those of release from bonds, knots, or nooses (*bandha*, *granthi*, *pāśa*, etc.). In Skr. also, to be independent ("on one's own hook") is expressed by the significant term *sva-tantra* (*√tan*), "being one's own thread, string or wire"; we are not, then, if we "know our Self," the knot, but the thread in which the knot is tied or on which beads are strung, the meaning of which will be clear from the often repeated simile of the threaded beads, cited above. The knots are many, but the thread is one. Indra, the Great Hero (*mahāvīra*) is said to have "found out the secret knot of *Suṣṇa*,"<sup>30</sup> and it is significant that the followers of the later *Mahāvīra* are known as Nirgrantha, "whose knot is undone." There is a prayer addressed to Soma to "untie as it were a knot, the entangled (*grathitam*, knotted) straight and tortuous paths,"<sup>31</sup> that is, almost literally, to guide us through the labyrinth in which these ways are indeed confused. The Spirit is in bonds only where and when the knots of individuality are tied; its and our true Self is the continuity of the thread on which the individualized entities are strung.<sup>32</sup>

"Continuity of the thread": in these words lies the clew to the doctrine *que s'asconde nel velame degli nodi strani*—to adapt the words of Dante that must have been familiar to Leonardo. For what our "complex" states—and solves—is the relationship of one to many: "one as he is there in himself, many as he is here in his children";<sup>33</sup> one as thread and many in the knots, for as the *Brahma Upaniṣat* expresses it, the solar Spider spins his web of a single thread;<sup>34</sup> an omnipresent thread, immanent and transcendent, "undivided in things divided," "measureless in measured things," "bodiless in

bodies," "imperishable in the perishable,"<sup>35</sup> "th' unstable, Thou, the stable, rangest."<sup>36</sup>

To have realized that the thread is one, however many the knots, is to be assured that by holding on to this one thread or golden chain by which, as Plato says, we are suspended from above, we cannot go astray; it is only for so long as we think of the knots as independent substances that we cannot "thread the maze" or escape from the toil.<sup>37</sup> The device is really a labyrinth, and whoever keeps on going without ever turning back, however much the way winds, will inevitably reach "the end of the road"; and just as in the medieval labyrinths he will see there the image of the architect, or at the center of the knots their author's name, so there at world's end will be found the cosmic Architect, who is himself the Way and the Door.<sup>38</sup>

The unity of the thread is reflected in what has been called the "one-line technique," of which our knots are an example, and that is equally of our knots and of the spiral forms to which the labyrinths approximate. In this technique, one line is used to form the whole design. The line is often white on a black ground, and as E. L. Watson says, "the use of white lines, known as 'negatives,' to carry the continuity is a prehistoric characteristic";<sup>39</sup> and while the line is by no means always thus a "negative," its whiteness is still conspicuous in the case of our knots and in the representations of labyrinths. Good examples of the continuous white line, combined with spirals, are represented in the two designs (Figs. 7, 8) from American Indian (Mimbres) bowls, both of which are unquestionably cosmic diagrams.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, the one-line technique in black has quite an extraordinary development in European calligraphy. Here, quite likely, it is at last employed solely for decorative purposes and without awareness of an implicit significance, although in the hands of the Spaniard Pedro Diaz Morante, perhaps its most brilliant exponent, it is repeatedly employed to form traditional motives that are far from meaningless to anyone who is acquainted with their history. One of these (Fig. 9), in which the ancient motive of the Hare and Hounds<sup>41</sup> is treated, is reproduced here from Morante's little book of calligraphic models, entitled *Nueva Arte de Escribir*,<sup>42</sup> in which, however, far more complicated examples are to be found. We find the "one-line," too, employed in parts of his wood engraving of the Phoenix (Fig. 10), protecting a trinity of rabbits (who are guarded also by a one-line "fence") from the poison of the snake, in what Strzygowski would have called a "Hvarena landscape" and is undoubtedly a Paradise; the inscription, "My piety makes light of poison," in connection with the ancient



motive of the Sunbird killing a snake, makes it almost certain that Morante meant his Phoenix for a type of Christ; while the form of the "fence" reminds us that the Greek key-pattern or meander had once a metaphysical significance.<sup>43</sup> But it is, perhaps, in the New Hebrides that the one-line technique attains its fullest development.<sup>44</sup> Here drawings representing a great variety of animals and other forms, and in some cases at least having a religious significance and delineating the Way, are made with a pointed stick on a surface of smooth sand and are not permanent; the one-line tortoise (Fig. 17) is curiously like a tortoise that occurs in Morante's book. There can be no doubt but that the well-known "string-figures" which represent all kinds of subjects and are met with in such variety all over the world, are also delineations in a similar sense. What, indeed, is Leonardo's "fantasy" but the representation of a "string-figure" of the universe?

We have already remarked that our knots and labyrinths approximate to spiral forms. In the case of the single spiral, which resembles a coiled rope or snake,<sup>45</sup> it is evident that if we follow round the line from the outside we reach a center, just as in following round the thread of a spider's web we should reach the spider's "parlor." Of such a spiral we reproduce a remarkable example from the Berthold Missal (Fig. 11);<sup>46</sup> and it will be noticed that the spiral, formed of the main stem of the Vine (of which "ye are the branches," John 15:1), when we come to the navel of the design, turns inwards, out of the plane of the design, and can only be thought of as connected with the figure of the Pantokrator seen above the cross-bar of the Tau; it is, in fact a tree whose "roots are above."<sup>47</sup> If we turn from such a spiral as this to Claude Mellan's extraordinary engraving (Fig. 12),<sup>48</sup> a representation of the Sudarium by means of an unbroken spiral line which, after countless revolutions, ends on the tip of the nose, the center of the Christ face, we do not need the assurance of the subscription *Formatur unicus una* (By one the One is formed), to convince us that this is no mere tour de force. The spiral line is inevitably lost in the reproduction.

From the single we are naturally led to a consideration also of the double spiral.<sup>49</sup> Here too we shall meet with striking illustrations of the one-line technique. The spiral itself is a growth form;<sup>50</sup> and it will depend upon our own orientation with reference to movement along it, whether we think of it as a centrifugal or as a centripetal form. This ambiguity is made more explicit where we have before us a pair of connected spirals of which the convolutions are either in opposite directions or which are placed on opposite sides of a

common axis. These oppositions are essentially those of the paired motions of evolution and involution, birth and death, positive and negative values, etc., that inhere in the totality of the world extended in space and time.<sup>51</sup> On opposite sides of a common axis (where they are sometimes replaced by two separate forms each of concentric circles) they correspond to the right and left hand branches of the Sephirotic Tree and more generally to the "things of the right hand and those of the left." This is sufficiently clear in the Boston Museum earring (Fig. 13), of the type of which the history has been discussed by Miss Berta Segall.<sup>52</sup> The motive survives in the folk art of Sumatra (Fig. 14).<sup>53</sup>

Even more interesting is the double spiral form of many early fibulae, of which there is a magnificent example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Fig. 16).<sup>54</sup> The outstanding constructional feature in these brooches is the fact that the whole is made of a single wire, of which one end (which may be called the beginning) forms the "eye" and the other the "hook"<sup>55</sup> (which may be called its termination); it is, in other words, a metal pin or needle, bent upon itself, so that when it fastens anything the point rejoins the head or re-enters the eye; a wiry "thread" that ends where it began; and a snake with its tail in its mouth; and what it holds together is the two opposite edges of a "material" that is itself an imitation of the cosmic veil in which the spirit of life at once conceals and reveals itself. The whole is, so to speak, a puzzle: for what one sees when the device is in act, is only the two spirals, and it is not apparent that the whole is really an endless circle in which the visible spirals are the knots; we do not "see the point."<sup>56</sup> The last end and the first beginning coincide.

The primary sense of "broach" (= brooch) is that of anything acute, such as a pin, awl or spear, that penetrates a material; the same implement, bent upon itself, fastens or sews things together, as if it were in fact a thread. French *fibule*, as a surgical term, is in fact *suture*. It is only when we substitute a soft thread for the stiff wire that a way must be made for it by a needle; and then the thread remaining in the material is the trace, evidence and "clew" to the passage of the needle; just as our own short life is the trace of the unbroken Life whence it originates. We cannot here pursue the symbolism of embroidery, i.e., of the technique itself, except to call attention (1) to the correspondence of the needle to the arrow and (2) to the well-known symbolism of the "needle's eye" as a strait gate. How the quarters are attached to the Sun by a pneumatic thread, as stated, in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* VI. 7.1.17, is

very clearly demonstrated in the *Sarabhangā Jātaka*, where the Bodhisatta Jotipāla (the "Keeper of the Light") standing at the center of a field, at the four corners of which there have been set up posts, attaches a thread to the nock of his arrow and with one shot penetrates all four posts, the arrow passing a second time through the first post and then returning to his hand; thus, indeed, he "sews" all things to himself by means of a single thread. We meet with the needle's eye not only in the familiar context of Luke 18:25, but again in Rūmī's *Mathnawī* I. 3065, "'Tis the thread that is connected with the needle; the eye of the needle is not suitable for the camel."

We have said enough, perhaps, to remind the reader that in primitive art the needs of the soul and body are provided for at one and the same time, thus fulfilling the condition on which Plato admitted the artist to his ideal city. Here there is no divorce of meaning from use; much rather, the aptitude and beauty of the artifact (*et aptus et pulcher*, like St. Augustine's stylus and Xenophon's house) at the same time express and depend upon the form (idea) that underlies it; content and shape are indivisible. As Edmund Pottier says: "à l'origine toute représentation graphique répond à une pensée concrète et précise: c'est véritablement une écriture."<sup>57</sup> In the same way the art of the Middle Ages "was at once a script, a calculus and a symbolic code" and by the same token still "retained the hieratic grandeur of primitive art."<sup>58</sup> The Middle Ages, for which art had been not a merely "aesthetic" experience but an "intellectual virtue," lived on into the Renaissance; the modern divorce of "science" from "art" had not yet taken place; a Guido d'Arezzo could still maintain that it was not his art but his *documentum*, i.e., doctrine, that made the singer; philosopher and artist could still be combined without conflict in one and the same individual. M. Vulliaud remarks that some of Leonardo's works are "enigmatic," and can only be understood in the light of the "intellectualism of the Renaissance." He is speaking, indeed, of the paintings, but what he says will apply as well to the geometrical "fantasies." He points out that the Renaissance, too, "expressed itself through the *lingua franca* of symbolism" and that Leonardo was by no means the least of those artists in whose works it is the voice of the spirit rather than that of fancy that can be heard. "To pretend," he says, "that Leonardo painted traditional subjects in which he did not believe, I dare not."<sup>59</sup> Belief is defined theologically as "assent to a credible proposition" and we are asked to "believe in order to understand." For the modern decorator, indeed, ornament is nothing but an "ornament," devoid of any "meaning"; but I cannot admit that Leonardo



was already one of those who do not "understand their material." And even if it could be proved that in his concatenations he was only amusing himself, it would still remain that these unilinear devices retain a meaning in the same way that a word retains its meaning even when spoken by one who no longer knows what it means, and that its history can only be understood when we take account of this meaning.

I am sure that nearly every reader of the present article will spring to Leonardo's defense, claiming that he was nothing but an artist and interested only in beauty. Many of our art historians and most of our estheticians claim that whereas art began with utility, the artist gradually frees himself from all mundane ties and spiritual theses, the idea of beauty then separating itself from life to stand alone in its own right. Thus Jerphanion distinguishes the interest of the archaeologist who seeks in the monument for *l'expression d'une pensée* from the critic and historian of art whose only concern is to discover *un rayon de beauté*.<sup>60</sup> It is in the same sense that Deonna hails the "progress" of art from a primitive *formality* to a classical *figuration* in which all significance is lost and there remains nothing but an esthetic surface to which we are expected to react only emotionally; what had been an imitation of nature in her manner of operation becomes an imitation of *la nature morte*. But at what a price has this "emancipation," H. M. Kallen's "conquest of fate and defeat of God," been bought! As Deonna himself admits, "les belles apparences" to which the art is now directed are:

de beaux corps trop souvent dépourvus de vie intérieure. L'imitation de la réalité, entraîne le classicisme sur cette pente que devait lui être funeste . . . le primitivisme demeure vivace . . . le classicisme, après avoir parcouru en quelques siècles ses possibilités, est épuisé, et ne peut se renover par lui-même.<sup>61</sup>

Ours is, indeed, a world of *impoverished* reality.<sup>62</sup>

We have no intention to deny that Leonardo cared, perhaps as much as Plato himself, for "beauty"; our argument is that "the beauty of the material world" was still for him, as for Marsilio Ficino, "a kind of shadow or symbol of that of the immaterial world"; and that this applies as much to his abstract "fantasies" as to his more realistic drawings. Leonardo was still a whole man. Our distinction of a fine from an applied art, of the artist from the workman and of the archaeologist from the critic, are all the evidence of the contemporary schizophrenia; for none of these, by himself, is a whole man. Is it not absurd to pretend that man *cannot* be at the same time an archaeologist and a philoso-



Fig. 9. Hare and Hounds  
Design by Morante, "Nueva Arte de Escribir"



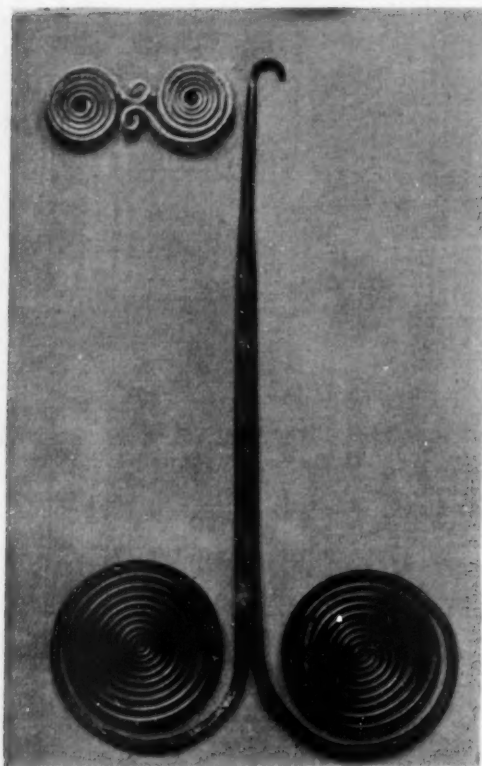
Fig. 10. Phoenix  
Engraving by Morante



Fig. 11. INITIAL TAU, Berthold Missal  
New York, Pierpont Morgan Library



Fig. 12. CLAUDE MELLAN, One-line Sudarium, 1649



← Fig. 13.  
GREEK ARCHAIC,  
*Fibula and Earring*  
Boston, Museum of  
Fine Arts

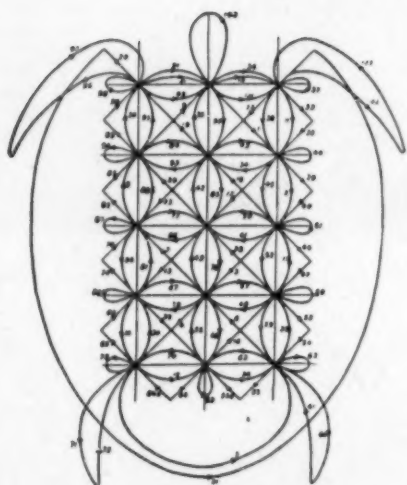
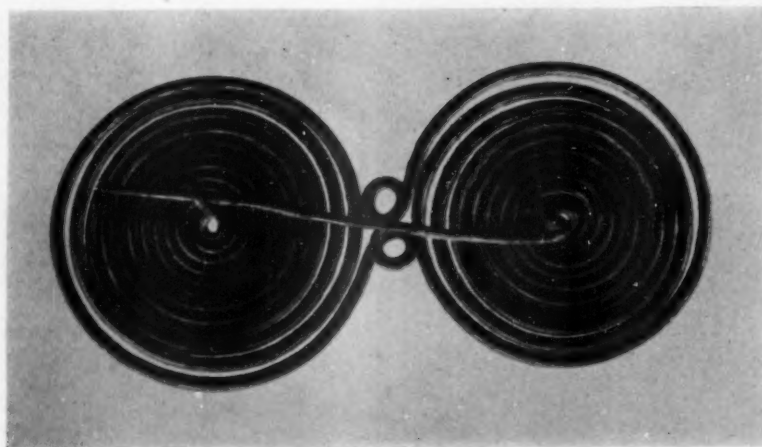


Fig 14. →  
G. KINZER,  
*Batak Woman*  
(drawing)

Fig. 15. →  
BOEOTIAN,  
9TH-7TH CENTURY B.C.,  
*Four-spiral (swastika) Fibula*  
After Blinkenberg, Fig. 388

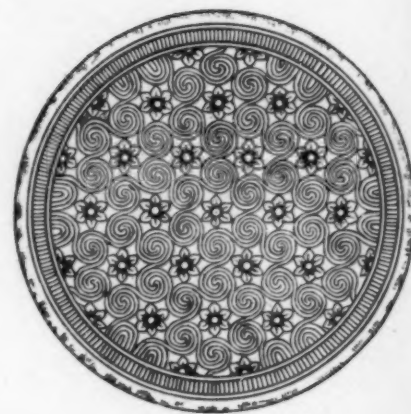


Fig. 16. →  
GREEK GEOMETRIC,  
*Double Spiral Fibula*  
New York, Metropolitan  
Museum of Art



← Fig. 17. NEW HEBRIDES,  
*One-line Tortoise*  
After Deacon and Harrison

Fig. 18. →  
BASARH, INDIA before  
4TH CENTURY, A.D.  
*Stone Tablet*  
ASI.AR., 1930-4, p. 99





pher or theologian whose interest is in ideas, *and* an artist whose interest is in "beauty" or in "feeling," or to pretend that the artist was less a man when he designed ornaments for the use of goldsmiths or embroiderers than when he painted the Gioconda? Let us at least desist from the persuasion that the primitives cared only for ideas on the one hand and the Renaissance only for beauty on the other. We assert that Leonardo's concatenation is *et aptus et pulcher* and that these are qualities inseparable in the thing itself; the knots are food for the mind as well as for the eye.

One further word: our customary horror of all "symbolic" explanations of works of art, apart from the fact that we are no longer interested in the intangibles to which the symbols refer, arises from the fact that symbolic analysis has so often been undertaken by amateurs and "interpreted" rather fancifully than knowingly. Then, again, we have in mind the romantic vagaries of the modern symbolists, with whose *symbolisme qui cherche* our traditional *lingua franca*, that of *le symbolisme qui sait*, has very little in common. A language that can be described as a "calculus" and as "precise," demands to be studied by methods no less disciplined than those of the philologist. We have tried to show in the present article how such investigations should be conducted.

- <sup>1</sup> Valentin Scherer, *Dürer* (3rd ed.), Klassiker der Kunst. The *Sechs Knoten* are reproduced on pls. 223-225.
- <sup>2</sup> G. Goldscheider, *Leonardo da Vinci the Artist*, Oxford, 1943, pp. 6, 7 and Fig. 5 (in the present article, Fig. 2).
- <sup>3</sup> A. M. Hind, *Catalogue of Early Italian Engraving in the British Museum*, 1910, p. 405.
- <sup>4</sup> G. d'Adda, "Essai bibliographique des anciens modèles de lingerie, dentelles et tapisseries," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, XVII (1864), 434 ff; also the same author's "Leonardo da Vinci, la gravure milanaise et passavant," *ibid.*, XXV (1868), II, 123.
- <sup>5</sup> Illustrations of these and other early labyrinths will be found in C. N. Deedes, "The Labyrinth"; in S. H. Hooke (editor), *The Labyrinth*, London and New York, 1935; W. H. Matthews, *Mazes and Labyrinths*, London, 1922.
- <sup>6</sup> W. R. Lethaby, *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, London, 1892, Ch. VII. See also Fr. M. Th. Böhl, "Zum babylonische Ursprung des Labyrinths," *Anecdota Orientalia*, XXII, 1935, 6-23.
- <sup>7</sup> The equation of "Troy" with "labyrinth" is discussed by Deedes, *loc. cit.*, pp. 34-41, and by W. F. J. Knight, *Cumaeum Gates*, Oxford, 1936, Chs. V-VII.
- <sup>8</sup> H. R. Hahnloser, *Villard de Honnecourt*, Wien, 1935, p. 38 and pl. 14 g.
- <sup>9</sup> The mention of spider's webs is strictly appropriate, for the Sun is the primordial spinner moving along the threads he spins (*Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* XIV. 2.2.22), and often explicitly likened to a spider (see references in *JAO*, 55, 1935, pp. 397-8) who "makes his net with a single thread" (*Brāhma Upaniṣat* 1), and "wise is he who layeth hold upon it" (*ibid.*, 3). There is more in the words, "Come into my parlor, said the spider to the fly," than catches the ear. The remarkable perfection of the "spider" symbolism extends to the fact that the radii (warp, threads) of the web are not sticky, while the spiral (woof) is adhesive; the spider himself walks only on the radii while the flies are caught on the sticky threads. For the "moral" of this tackiness see my "Note on the Stickfast Motif" in *Folklore*, LVII (1944), 128-131: "sense-experience depends on contact, and he who touches may be caught."
- <sup>10</sup> Special senses of *nodo* include *nodo di Salomone* "a design showing a knot without any ends in the cords being visible," *nodo* as "string (of pearls)," and *nodi della vita*, "ties of the soul to the body" (Hoare's Italian Dictionary). Wicksteed and Oelsner render *nodo* by "complex," and that is just what a "knot" is. "Universal form": for, "indeed, this All is held together by invisible powers, which the Craftsman has extended (*apēteine*) from the ends of the earth even unto the sky, taking wise forethought that the things bound (*debtēnta*) and pendent, as it were, from a chain (*seirā*), should not be loosed; for the powers of the All are bonds (*desmot*) that cannot be broken" (Philo, *Migr.* 181 with 167). Here things are thought of (in 167) as if pendent from a garland or necklace, to which they are secured, and to fall away from which would be their death. It is in this sense that in India the death of the individual is described as a being "cut off"; and in the same way in China, "the ancients described death as the loosening of the cord on which God suspended their life" (Chwang Tzu III. 4). Similarly at the dissolution of the universe, the "wind cords" are severed (*Maitri Upaniṣat* I. 4), cf. *JRAS*, 1942, p. 230, note 6 and 1943, p. 107, note 1; these "wind cords" are likewise those to which Rūmī refers as "cords of causation" (*Mathnawī* I. 647).
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. René Guénon, *L'Esotérisme de Dante*, Paris, 1925; J. H. Probst-Biraben, "Léonardo de Vinci, Initié," *Le Voile d'Isis*, 38, 1933, pp. 260-266; "Symbolisme des arts plastiques de l'occident et due proche orient," *ibid.*, 40, 1935, pp. 160-173 (p. 171, "Les génies de la Renaissance étaient à la fois initiés aux rites et symboles des Fraternités orientales et occidentales, procédant de la Qabbale et de Soufisme, aussi bien du Pythagorisme, due Platonisme et de l'Alexandrinisme, qui sont en gros identiques, coïncident et se succèdent par des transitions insensibles"); Paul Vulliaud, *La pensée ésotérique de Leonardo da Vinci*, Paris, 1910.
- <sup>12</sup> In *Schweizer Volkskunst; Art Populaire Suisse*, Basle, 1941, p. 85, cf. pp. 94-96. In the same volume will be found some good examples of calligraphic ornaments in "one-line technique." Cf. René Guénon, "Le symbolisme du tissage," *Le Voile d'Isis*, XXXV (1930), 65-70.
- <sup>13</sup> The words are A. B. Cook's in *Zeus*, II, 1029, based on the Orphic Fragment, Niels 165, and other sources.
- <sup>14</sup> *Op. Om.* p. 981, cited by P. O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, 1943, p. 116.
- <sup>15</sup> "L'arabesque, ce poème linéaire où la géométrie, la musique et l'écriture se rejoignent, est une synthèse métaphysique . . . L'arabesque offre ainsi un passage incomparable du point de vue spatial au point de vue temporel . . . De même que le *dhikr*, discipline d'incantation, l'arabesque entraîne celui que l'éprouve sur le chemin de retour vers Allah." (Elie Lebasquais in *Le Voile d'Isis*, 40, 1935, p. 281. Luc Benoist, *Art du monde*, 3rd ed. 1941, pp. 178-9.) Cf. E. Diez, "A stylistic Analysis of Islamic Art," *Ars Islamica*, V (1938), 36-45: "Islamic art is the art which expresses submission to [I would say, dependence upon] Allah . . . Islamic art appears as the individuation of its metaphysical basis (*unendlichen Grund*) . . . The construction of the linear configurations is . . . insoluble for the spectator's eye, and thus elevated above the limits of normal human reason into the sphere of divine inscrutability. These nets of lines and formulas, though thought out by human intellect, signify to a certain degree an outwitting and a supernatural surpassing of the human limits of reason. The best confirmation for the categorization of Islamic art as being polar-ornamentalistic is the Persian denotation of a rug pattern as *zemān* ('time'), and of the ground as *zemīn* ('space')." In connection with the further statement, "every single figure of any ornamental design . . . has a concrete mystic and symbolic significance," Diez cites J. Karabeczek, *Die persische Nadelmalerei Susandjird*, Leipzig, 1881, pp. 137-67.
- <sup>16</sup> R. A. Nicholson, *Odes of Shams-i-Tabriz*, Cambridge, 1898, no. 28.
- <sup>17</sup> In *Folklore*, XXV (1914), p. 397.
- <sup>18</sup> *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* VI. 7.1.17 and VIII. 7.3.10.
- <sup>19</sup> *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣat* III. 7.1; cf. *Sarvopaniṣat* 3 (19), where the thread on which the gems are strung is the Spirit (*ātman*, Self) as Inner Controller, just as for Plato the "golden cord" by which we are suspended from above is our Hegemon. The thread-spirit concept is not only widely diffused, but of great antiquity: for "the word *markasu*, 'band,' 'rope,' is employed in Babylonian mythology for the cosmic principle which

unites all things, and is used also in the sense of 'support,' the divine power and law which holds the universe together" (S. Langdon, *Semitic Mythology*, 1931, p. 109). Chwang Tzu (Ch. VI; in Hughes' version, *Everyman's Library* No. 973, p. 193) speaks of the Tao as "the link of all creation": the character rendered here by "link" is *hsi* (Giles 4062, synonymous with 4061 and 4104) with the meanings "dependence," "fastening," "tie," "link," "nexus," "chain," "lineage," etc.; and as the phonetic determinant (=4061) in *hsi* is pictorially a strand of spun silk, it is clear that Chwang Tzu's is a "thread-spirit" doctrine. Again, bearing in mind that the "cord" can be equated with the "Word" of God, it is significant that a well-known Hadith describes the Qur'an as "a rope to which every True Believer must cling for safety."

<sup>20</sup> *Aitareya Aranyaka* I. 4.3.

<sup>21</sup> Hermes Trismegistos *Lib. XVI*. 5-7 and *Aesc.* III. 34 C. In the first passage the verb (*hidruo*) is one that is often used in connection with the "setting up" of statues, especially of heroes, and this reminds us of the medieval practise mentioned above. The comparison of the universe to a garment or tissue appears also in India, notably in the first words of the *Isāvārya Upaniṣat*, "All this, whatever moveth in the moving-world, is the Lord's garment."

<sup>22</sup> *Aitareya Aranyaka* II. 1.6. *Dēo, desmōs* (Skr. *dā, bind*); *bēlko; eiro, bērma, seirā* (Skr. *śr, "glide," Lat. series*); and *teino* (Skr. *tan, tanti, tantr, tantu, tanū, etc.*) are the key words in Greek and Indian contexts for the present cycle of ideas. The equation of knots with names may be connected with what was once an almost worldwide (old Chinese, Sumerian, Hebrew, Mexican) method of keeping records by means of knotted string. Thus Jeremias observes that Gudea seems to speak of "knots of words," and that in Sumeria knots may have preceded writing (*Altorientalische Geistesgeschichte*, p. 19); and Gaster that in OT. *sis* = ball or knop and that in Numbers V, 38, 39, etc. the reference is not to "fringes" but to "elaborate mnemonic knots," while the beads of rosaries have taken the place of what were originally knots (*Folklore*, XXV (1914), pp. 254-258). St. Augustine refers to "knots, which they call characters," and which have either a hidden or an evident meaning (*De doctr. christ.*, II, 20). In the *Kaṭhā Sarit Sāgara* 25.14 (Bombay ed. 1889, p. 116) the beads of an aged Brahman ascetic's rosary are compared in number to knots (*granthi*) marking the centuries of his life (cf. Penzer II. 189). The trace of the use of mnemonic knots seems to survive in Skr. *grantha, grantbana* = literary composition and *granthin*, one who knows the letter of a text (Manu XII. 103). We can still speak of the "thread of a discourse" or of that of an argument; and tie mnemonic knots in handkerchiefs or round a finger. Our problems, too, are often "knotty"; and we call the outcome of a drama the *denouement*.

<sup>23</sup> *Chāndogya Upaniṣat* VI. 1.4.

<sup>24</sup> *Satapattha Brāhmaṇa* IV. 6.5.3.

<sup>25</sup> *Journal of Philosophy*, XXXIV (1937), 351.

<sup>26</sup> *Rgveda* III. 38.7, X. 82.3 and *passim*.

<sup>27</sup> *Satapattha Brāhmaṇa* VI. 1.3.9, cf. *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* VI. 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Sāṅkhāyana Aranyaka* XI. 8.

<sup>29</sup> For the "knots of the heart" see *Chāndogya Upaniṣat* VII. 26.2 and *Kaṭha Up.* VI. 15, etc. The references to bonds and knots collected in J. Heckenbach, *De nuditate sacra sacrisque vinculis*, Giessen, 1911, have mostly to do with the ritual untyings that symbolize a spiritual liberation (*lūsis, mokṣa*).

<sup>30</sup> *Rgveda* X. 61.13.

<sup>31</sup> *Rgveda* IX. 97.18.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Sarvopaniṣat* 1-3 and 19.

<sup>33</sup> *Satapattha Brāhmaṇa* X. 5.2.16, in answer to the question, "Is he one or many?"

<sup>34</sup> Thus "putting on appearances about his own thread (*tanū*)" (*Rgveda* III. 53.8, cf. VI. 49.18), "winding through" them all (*ibid.* I. 69.2).

<sup>35</sup> *Atharva Veda* X. 7.39, XI. 4.15; *Kaṭha Upaniṣat* II. 22; *Bhagavad Gītā* XIII. 7.16, XVIII. 20, etc. Cf. Hermes Trismegistos *Lib.* V. 10 a.

<sup>36</sup> Joshua Sylvester.

<sup>37</sup> Lat. *tela* (*texila*), "web," and metaphorically "pattern" or "design."

<sup>38</sup> The analogy of the human and divine architects is drawn repeatedly throughout the Middle Ages. Leonardo says himself that "that divine power, which lies in the knowledge of the painter, transforms the mind of the painter into the likeness of the divine mind" (H. Ludwig in Eitelberger's *Quellenschriften für Kunstgeschichte*, 68).

<sup>39</sup> Edith L. Watson, "The One-Line Technique," *Art and Archaeology*, XXXIV, Sept.-Oct. 1933, 227-234, 247.

<sup>40</sup> After E. L. Watson. loc. cit. The types illustrated have many close parallels in old world art, see, for example, Anna Roes, "Tierwirbel," in *IPEK*, II (1936-37), Abb. 12, 21, 31.

<sup>41</sup> For this motive, which is closely connected with that of the Symplegades, see E. Pottier, "L'histoire d'une bête," *Revue de l'Art Ancien et Moderne*, t. XXVII (1910), 419-436, and Karl von Spiess, "Die Hasenjagd," *Jahrb. f. Historische Volkskunde*, V, VI (1897), 243-267.

<sup>42</sup> Parts I-IV, Madrid, 1616-31.

<sup>43</sup> "From the fact that it was used to surround the figures of divine and royal persons and was associated with cult objects, the pattern seems to have possessed a protective value" (C. N. Deedes, *op. cit.*, p. 11). It can hardly be doubted, indeed, that this was the original intention of all kinds of borders, frets and frames enclosing a field. Cf. E. Küster, *Der Schlange in der griechischen Kunst und Religion*, Giessen, 1913, pp. 10, 18, 21, 25, 95 (the formal development of the neolithic snake-motive is from the single to the double spiral, then to the continuous spiral ("running dog") and finally to the spiral meander; the significance of the snake is not only vegetative, but also apotropaic).

<sup>44</sup> A. B. Deacon, "Geometrical Drawings from Malekula and other Islands of the New Hebrides," *J. Roy. Anthropol. Inst.*, LXIV (1934), 129 f; and T. Harrison, *Savage Civilisation*, 1937. See also John Layard, *Stone Men of Malekula*. Vao., London, 1942, reviewed by M. F. Ashley Montagu in *Isis* XXXV (1944),



43, 44 ("Mr. Layard's valuable analysis of the relationship between the ingenious labyrinthine sand tracings of Vao and Atchin and mythology. Here we see clearly how illuminating the carefully recorded facts of a primitive culture can be for our understanding of puzzling problems presented by later cultures"); cf. notes 5-7, above.

<sup>43</sup> We cannot enter here into the intimate connection of "ropes" with "snakes," and can only remark in passing that from certain points the convolutions of our "cord" are to be regarded as the coils of a cosmic serpent, in which we are entangled. Designs of interlacing serpents are met with all over the world and are very abundant. Cf. H. H. van der Osten, "The Snake Symbol and Hittite Twist," *AJA.*, Series II, XXX (1926), 405-417. For the elaborate technique by which the spiral designs of primitive art appear to have been actually traced and some discussion of the meaning of spirals, see Lars-Ivar Ringbom, "Entstehung und Entwicklung der Spiralornamentik," *Acta Archaeologica*, IV, Kobenhavn, 1933.

<sup>44</sup> Hanns Swarzenski, *The Berthold Missal* (Pierpont Morgan Library MS 710), New York, 1943 (folio ii v., full page initial T).

<sup>45</sup> For this motif see my "Inverted Tree," *Q. J. Mythic Soc.*, XXIX, 1938. Also Richard Rolle de Hampolle, *Pricke of Conscience*, 11.662-685, quoting and based upon Pope Innocent III, *De contemptu mundi*, lib. I, cap. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Ch. le Blanc, *Manuel de l'Amateur d'Estampes*, III, 3, No. 33. Mellan's dates are 1598-1668.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. René Guénon, "La Double Spirale," *Etudes Traditionnelles*, 41, 1936. See also René Dussaud, *Les civilisations préhelléniques*, 1910, p. 218 f; the motive had a religious significance and played a part in ritual.

<sup>48</sup> T. A. Cook, *The Curves of Life*, London, 1914; D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *Growth and Form*, Cambridge (Eng.), 1943.

<sup>49</sup> Compare the winding and unwinding of the ribbons by which the dancers are connected to the Maypole. The history of the labyrinth is intimately connected with that of dancing and we still speak of "treading a maze."

<sup>50</sup> MFA. Bulletin, No. 245, 1943.

<sup>51</sup> "Wer sich darüber wundert, dass ein Symbol als Form nicht nur jahrtausendlang am Leben bleibt, sondern auch . . . nach tausendjähriger Unterbrechung wieder zum Leben entsteht, der möge sich sagen, dass die Kraft der geistigen Welt, welcher der einen Teil des Symbols bildet, ewig ist" (W. Andrae, *Die ionische Säule, Bauform oder Symbol*, 1933, p. 66).

<sup>52</sup> Many others are illustrated in Chr. Blinkenberg's fascinating book, *Fibules grecques et orientales*, Kobenhavn, 1926, pp. 253-261. There are also examples of a type with four spirals (Fig. 15), forming a swastika, and a few with six spirals and a central disk. The spiral fibulae are actually "Geometric" (9th century B.C. and later), but so far as their form is concerned they represent a survival of Mycenaean style. The form in which the spirals are replaced by independent circular disks, although contemporary, is typologically a derivative of the double spiral type. It may be observed here that the modern "hook and eye" is nothing but a divided fibula. It may be noted that "frogs" have nothing to do with the Batrachia but with Lat. *flocus*, a "flock" of wool, cf. "frock."

<sup>53</sup> The notion of the "hook" which corresponds to the point of the pin by which the material is really "caught" up, appears also in the symbolism of fishing with a line. For example to the *logos*, "I will make you fishers of men" (Mark I: 17) corresponds Hafiz' couplet, "Fish-like in the sea behold me swimming, Till he with his hook my rescue maketh." This means of rescue has, indeed, actually been provided for the saving of shipwrecked men and one can easily see how well a naval chaplain could preach on such a text. In fishing with a net the whole body of the net, and in hunting with a lasso the slip-knot, corresponds to the "hook."

<sup>54</sup> We have previously discussed the symbolism of safety-pins in an article on the "Primitive Mentality" (*Q. J. Mythic Soc.*, XXXI, 1940) and remarked there that "the significance of the metal pin, and that of the thread that is left behind by the needle are the same: it is that of the 'thread-spirit' (*sūtrātman*) by which the Sun connects all things to himself and fastens them; he is the primordial embroiderer and tailor, by whom the tissue of the universe, of which our garments are an analogy, is woven on a living thread." In the same connection it may be noted that the gold threads with which a material is often shot through are explicitly in order to enliven it (*Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* V. 3.5.15) in accordance with the recognized equation of "gold" with "life, light and immortality."

<sup>55</sup> *Céramique peinte de Suse*, Délégation en Perse, XIII (1912), 52.

<sup>56</sup> Emil Mâle, *Religious Art of the Thirteenth Century in France*, 1913, Introduction.

<sup>57</sup> Vulliaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>58</sup> G. de Jerphanion, *La Voix des monuments*, Paris, 1930.

<sup>59</sup> W. Deonna, "Primitivisme et classicisme, les deux faces de l'histoire de l'art," *Bull. de l'Office Internat. d. Inst. d'Archéologie et d'Histoire d'Art*, X, 1937. That the so-called progress from formality to figuration is in reality a decadence is the thesis of A. Gleizes' *Vers une conscience plastique, La forme et l'histoire*, Paris, 1932.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Iredell Jenkins, "The Postulate of an Impoverished Reality," *Journal of Philosophy*, XXXIX, 533-546.

## REMBRANDT AND GUERCINO

By JAKOB ROSENBERG

DOCUMENTS on Rembrandt's life are rare. The master's own work tells us a good deal about his personality, about the persons closest to him, about his life and his surroundings, but his art is far from a mere matter-of-fact statement. Mystery and romanticism permeate most of his subjects and it is small wonder, therefore, that legends about Rembrandt's life flourish abundantly, even in our time.

Under these circumstances it was almost a revelation when, in 1916, a series of documents came to light which modified considerably the traditional conception of the aged Rembrandt as an outmoded, desolate and almost forgotten figure who spent the latter part of his life in gloomy and tragic isolation. These documents, published in *Bollettino d'Arte* in 1916 by the Marchese Vincenzo Ruffo, show that the mature Rembrandt was an internationally known figure whose reputation had spread as far as the southernmost end of Europe. Here, in Messina, Don Antonio Ruffo, a great nobleman and the ancestor of the publisher of the Ruffo archives, founded in the middle of the seventeenth century an important collection of paintings, largely by contemporary masters. He was anxious to acquire paintings by Rembrandt, for which he was willing to pay much higher prices than for the works of contemporary celebrities in Italy. The correspondence on this matter extends over a number of years. In 1652 Don Antonio Ruffo ordered from Rembrandt a "Philosopher," which was finished in 1653 and delivered in 1654. This is the *Aristotle* now in the Erickson Collection in New York (Fig. 2). In 1661 Don Ruffo acquired an "Alexander the Great," which G. J. Hoogewerff<sup>1</sup> has tried to identify with the so-called *Athena*, formerly in the Hermitage. Bredius, however, has questioned this identification.<sup>2</sup> And in 1662 Don Ruffo ordered the *Homer* now in the Museum in the Hague. This picture was returned to Rembrandt because of its alleged unfinished state, but re-accepted in 1663, after the painter had worked it over. Finally, in 1669, the year of Rembrandt's death, the Marquis bought a large collection of Rembrandt's etchings, no less than one hundred and eighty-nine, selected by the artist himself and shipped to his noble Italian patron. It is quite possible that this transaction was the last one carried out by the old Rembrandt, for the prints arrived in Messina after his death.

A few years after the acquisition of the *Aristotle*, Don Antonio Ruffo de-

cided to have two companion pieces added by prominent Italian painters. He turned, with this request, to Guercino and a year later to Mattia Preti. We offer here, in an English translation, Guercino's reply, which is preserved in the Ruffo archives and represents a most noteworthy document. For it shows, first, the high appreciation of Rembrandt by one of the most famous contemporary Italian masters. And, second, it tells us about the old Guercino's willingness (he was then a man of almost seventy years) to paint in his "early" manner, as Don Antonio Ruffo must have asked him to do, in order to make his painting correspond to the chiaroscuro character of Rembrandt's work. The letter reads as follows:

As for the half-figure of Rembrandt which has come into your hands, it cannot be other than complete perfection, because I have seen various works of his in prints which have come to our region. They are very beautiful in execution, engraved with good taste and done in a fine manner, so that one can assume that his work in color is likewise of complete exquisiteness and perfection. I sincerely esteem him as a great artist.

Then as to the half-figure which you desire from me as a companion piece to that of Rembrandt, but to be done in my first broad manner, I am quite ready to agree, and to carry it out according to your orders. Will you, therefore, kindly send me the measurements, both the height and the breadth of the painting, so that I, on my part, shall not fail to use the same dimensions, and as much as my poor ability will allow, you yourself will see expressed in this picture.

If you would also, on the occasion of sending me the measurements, be willing to honor me with a little sketch of Rembrandt's picture, done by some painter, so that I could see the disposition of the half-figure, I should consider it the greatest favor, and should be better able to make a counterpart, as well as to place the light in the right place. I shall wait also for the subject which I am to represent, in order to be able to conform more closely to your wishes. . . .

—Bologna, June 13, 1660.<sup>3</sup>

On August 18 of the same year Guercino acknowledges the receipt of the sketch after the Rembrandt painting which he had asked for; and on October 6, in the following passage, he informs Don Ruffo about the subject he has chosen:

For the half-figure to accompany that of Rembrandt, which I judge represents a Physiognomist, I thought it would be very appropriate to paint a Cosmographer, as I have in fact already done.<sup>4</sup>

On February 6, 1661, the "Cosmographer" arrived at Messina. The picture is described in the inventory of the Ruffo gallery as follows:

Cosmografo con un turbante turchino in testa che considera un mappamondo tenuto con la mano sinistra sopra un tavolino e con la destra va accennando. . . . Misura: 8 x 6 palmi. (A Cosmographer with a Turkish



turban on his head, considering a geographical globe held with his left hand on a table, while he points to it with his right.)<sup>6</sup>

It has been regretted<sup>6</sup> that no trace is left of Guercino's work which would show how an outstanding Italian master tried to match Rembrandt in a companion painting. In a recent conversation with Professor Frank Jewett Mather, Jr. of Princeton, I happened to mention this subject. Thereupon I learned that the Museum of Princeton University received from the Dan Fellows Platt Bequest a Guercino drawing of a *Cosmographer* (Fig. 1); and closer investigation left no doubt that this was the draft by Guercino for the Ruffo painting of the *Cosmographer*.<sup>7</sup> The drawing is done in black chalk on white paper which has somewhat suffered by foxing, but the chalk lines are clearly preserved. The measurements (255 x 190 mm.) correspond to the proportions of the painting given in the inventory. The drawing is pasted on an eighteenth century paper which shows an old inscription "del Guercino," and several collectors' stamps: W. B. (Lugt 2605, unidentified), P, white on blue diamond (not listed by Lugt), and D. F. P. (Dan Fellows Platt).

One observes at once how closely Guercino made his composition fit that of Rembrandt. Rembrandt's *Aristotle* has been somewhat cut down. It originally measured 8 x 6 palms (ab. 192 x 144 cm.). Now it measures only 139 x 133 cm. Therefore the picture has lost more in height than in width. But it is still clear how the composition of Guercino corresponds to the Rembrandt painting in the position of the figure within the picture plane, in the lighting, the costume, the gesture, the general appearance. Of course, the essence of Rembrandt's work, the deep, meditative mood, which conveys so much of the artist's own spirituality, no one would expect to find in the Italian master's representation. Guercino gives to his subject the outward appearance of an ancient cosmographer as he understood it in the romantic and somewhat theatrical terms of the baroque. His *Cosmographer* makes his profession clear by gestures and attributes. He attracts attention in the most obvious way, by turning out of the picture and addressing the spectator. Rembrandt, on the other hand, creates a figure which is completely absorbed in his own world of deep meditation and mystery. The romantic attire of the *Aristotle* not only indicates baroque extravagance, as does the fancy turban in Guercino's painting—it is built into an expressive pictorial organization in which the chiaroscuro effect predominates but is combined with warmth and depth of color. How significant, for example, is the curve of the gold chain linking up the illuminated parts of the picture and glowing with a supernatural beauty against

the black gown of the philosopher. And how striking is the accord of black and white, set into the warm brown tonality of the surroundings.

Guercino's drawing does not tell us how the old painter managed to execute this picture in his "early" manner, as was requested. But the distance from Rembrandt's profundity and richness is already clear in the Italian master's drawing.

The other companion piece which Don Ruffo ordered a year later, in 1661, from the Neapolitan master Mattia Preti, represented Dionysius Seragosenos, the young tyrant of Syracuse who was expelled by his subjects and fled to Corinth, there to become a painter and the founder of a famous school of art. Mattia Preti was most polite in his answer and in his appreciative remarks about the works of Rembrandt and Guercino. They read as follows:

I have waited to write to you in order to see whether, along with my letter, I might send the picture with the half-figure which also has a turban wound about its head, just as in the other two extremely beautiful works already in your possession. Mine will represent Dionysius of Syracuse. . . .<sup>8</sup>

This picture was delivered in 1662 and is described in the inventory as "Dionisio di Siracusa maestro di scuola, ovato—Palmi 5 x 6." This picture is apparently also lost.

It would be interesting to know what Don Antonio Ruffo thought of the whole set of paintings, and to which of the three masters he finally gave his preference. We observe from his correspondence that he was not quite sure of his own judgment about Rembrandt and asked for confirmation from his artist advisers. One of these was the mediocre still-life painter Abraham Brueghel, a great grandson of Peter Brueghel the Elder, who had settled in Rome and become completely Italianized. He was far from being an objective judge. He was anxious to sell his own paintings to the Sicilian gentleman (who finally owned dozens of them), and to profit also by acting as agent for his Roman colleagues. Therefore he did everything in his power to injure Rembrandt's reputation, but his judgment also reflects the conventional prejudices of the Roman school. On May 22, 1665, he wrote from Rome:

As far as the paintings of Rembrandt are concerned, they are not very highly thought of here. It is true that they are somewhat beautiful as mere heads. But here in Rome one can invest his money much better.<sup>9</sup>

And on January 24, 1670, he wrote a letter which is noteworthy for its malicious arguments against Rembrandt:

By your letter of December 29 I see that you have had made various half-figures by the best painters of Italy, and that none of them approach that



Fig. 1. GUERCINO, *Cosmographer* (drawing)  
Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Art Museum



Fig. 2. REMBRANDT, *Aristotle*  
New York, A. W. Erickson Collection



of Rembrandt. It is true that I agree with this. But one must consider that great painters, like those by whom you have had your half-figures made, are not usually willing to lower themselves for a trifling draped half-figure in which the light shows only the tip of the nose, and in which one does not know where the light comes from, since all the rest is dark. The great painters try to show a beautiful nude body, in which one can also see their knowledge of drawing. But an incompetent person, on the contrary, tries to cover his figure with dark, clumsy garments; and this kind of painter does the contours so that one does not know what to make out of it. . . . What I merely want to say is, this is no business of great men, to occupy themselves with such trifles, which almost anyone can do. But I beg you to forgive me for speaking so freely. My love of painting leads me to do so. . . .<sup>10</sup>

But it seems that Don Antonio Ruffo was not too seriously shaken in his preference for the great Dutch master. Otherwise he would hardly have asked, after so many years of personal acquaintance with Rembrandt's paintings, for an almost complete set of his etchings.

Our little contribution shows how Guercino reacted to the work of Rembrandt and how he made an effort to match the Dutch master's art. Rembrandt's reaction to Guercino's art is still unknown, but one can assume that Rembrandt was not unacquainted with this highly reputed Italian master. I believe it is not by chance that so many similar subjects occur in the work of the two artists. Since Guercino was the older of the two and preceded Rembrandt not only in many subjects but also in the type of biblical painting with half-figures in life-size which Rembrandt favored in his mature period, some influence of the Bolognese master on Rembrandt is possible.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Oud Holland*, XXXV (1917), 130.

<sup>2</sup> *Rembrandts Gemälde*, Phaidon Press, 1935, pl. 479.

<sup>3</sup> *Oud Holland*, *op. cit.*, pp. 136 & 146; *Bollettino d'Arte*, 1916, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> *Oud Holland*, *op. cit.*, p. 136; *Bollettino d'Arte*, 1916, p. 102.

<sup>5</sup> *Bollettino d'Arte*, 1916, p. 126.

<sup>6</sup> T. Borenius, *Rembrandt Paintings*, Phaidon Press, 1942, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> I am much indebted to Professor Mather for this information as well as for permission to publish the drawing.

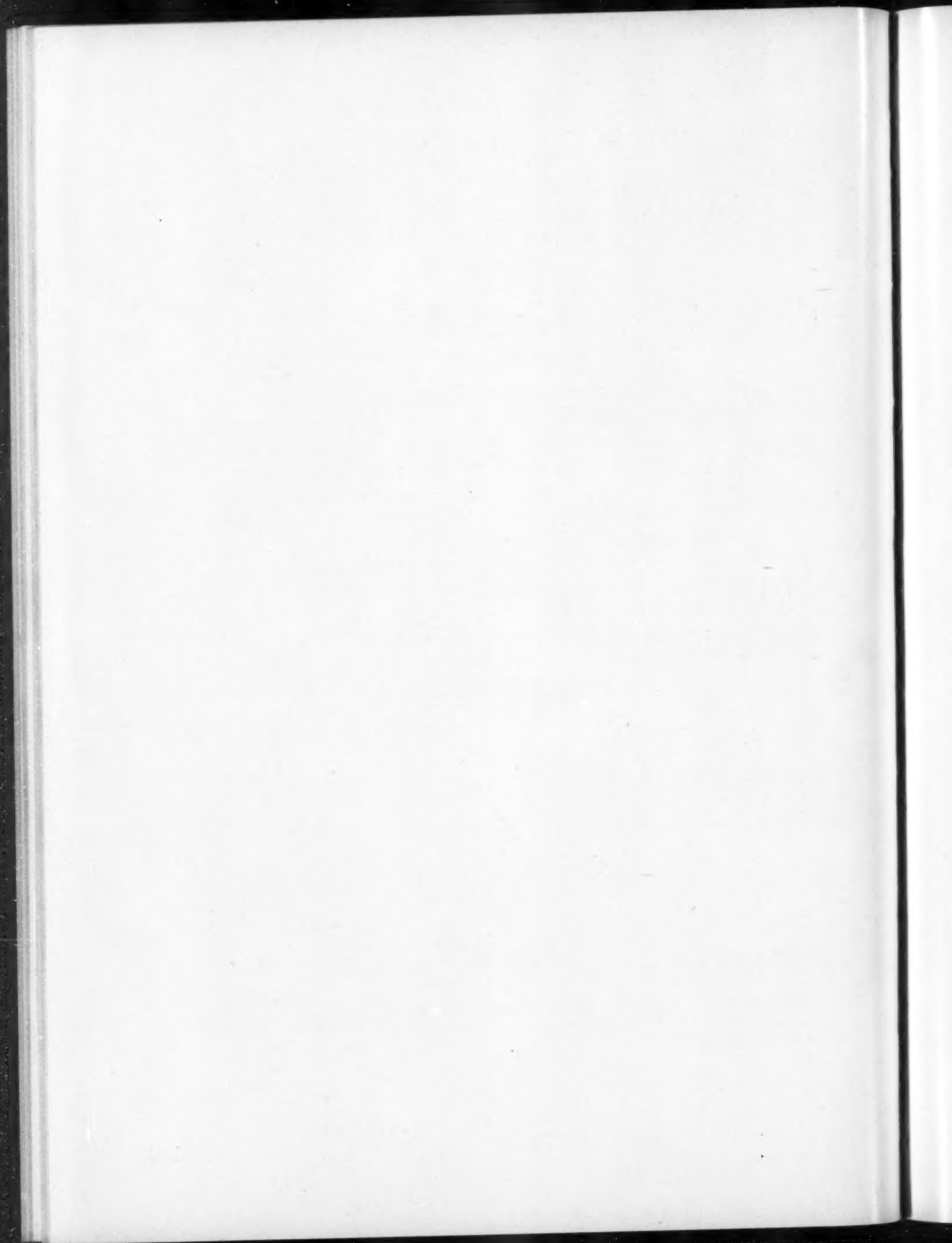
<sup>8</sup> *Oud Holland*, *op. cit.*, p. 137; *Bollettino d'Arte*, 1916, p. 241.

<sup>9</sup> *Oud Holland*, *op. cit.*, p. 144; *Bollettino d'Arte*, 1916, p. 174.

<sup>10</sup> *Oud Holland*, *op. cit.*, pp. 144 & 148; *Bollettino d'Arte*, 1916, p. 186.

<sup>11</sup> I am much indebted to Miss Ruth Magurn for the translation of the letters and for the kind revision of the manuscript.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The Editors wish to correct an error in Volume VII, page 30. Figure 11 is a work of Domenico di Michelino, not Bartolo di Fredi; Figure 12 is a work of Bartolo di Fredi, not Domenico di Michelino.*





RECENT IMPORTANT  
ACQUISITIONS  
OF AMERICAN COLLECTIONS



JACOB CORNELISZ, *Adoration of the Kings* (51 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 38 $\frac{3}{4}$ ")  
The Detroit Institute of Arts

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## THE RECENT ACQUISITIONS

### THE ADORATION OF THE KINGS BY JACOB CORNELISZ

From an article by W. R. Valentiner in the *Bulletin of  
The Detroit Institute of Arts*, March, 1944

Thanks to the Ralph H. Booth Fund the Museum has been able to acquire an important work by Jacob Cornelisz (c. 1470-1533), the founder of the Amsterdam school of painting in the early sixteenth century. His leading position at the beginning of a new civic culture at Amsterdam is somewhat similar to that of Lucas at Leiden, although he is less problematic a personality. The two are comparable in industry and many-sidedness: more than fifty paintings by him are known, of which hardly half a dozen are in this country. He painted in oil and water color, he made designs for painted glass and for tapestries, he executed woodcuts, he produced altar-pieces, murals, portraits, and the splendid development of portraiture at Amsterdam in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is to a considerable extent due to his and his son's (Dirk Jacobs) achievements.

As Holland was less developed than Flanders at this time, his style is not so refined as that of his contemporaries in Antwerp like Quentin Massys. But his forcefulness and directness of expression and solidity of linear and color construction make up for the lack of subtlety. Characteristically Dutch are the homely, peasant-like types of the Virgin and the adoring kings, with their bony, workman-like hands. The warm brown color scheme with strong contrasts of light and shadow from which a deep red and blue stand out in the costumes, presages the style of the great Dutch seventeenth century masters. The hard, forceful outlines of the figures show a connection with the art of woodcuts of which Jacob Cornelisz was a great master.

The artist painted the subject of the *Adoration of the Kings* more than once; the version formerly in the Stilwell collection, New York, and another formerly in the Kaufmann collection in Berlin are well known. The present version, which is unknown in the literature on the artist, is the largest and most beautiful of all and was executed about 1512. It was at that time that Jan Scorel entered the workshop of Jacob Cornelisz and stayed with him as assistant for several years. He is said to have executed some of the landscape backgrounds in his master's paintings. If we compare the *Crucifixion* by Jan Scorel in our Museum with the present *Adoration of the Kings*, we find similar tendencies in developing the distance through linear and aerial perspective. Both Jacob Cornelisz and Scorel are among the first Dutch painters to become aware of the change of local color in receding planes. The rich deep reds of the costumes in the foreground figures become lighter orange and pink in the angels in the air and in the soldiers in the middle distance, while the heavy blue changes into light blue in similar fashion.

Jacob Cornelisz was born in Alkmaar; the formerly anonymous Master of Alkmaar has been identified as his brother, Cornelis Buys. Both studied at Haarlem where Ouwater and Geertgen tot sint Jans had founded the foremost school of Dutch painting in the fifteenth century. How closely the schools of painting in Holland are related and interwoven, by the short distances between cities in that small country, is shown by the fact that Jacob Cornelisz was thus connected with the schools of Alkmaar, Haarlem and (through Scorel) Utrecht while the school which he founded at Amsterdam was situated in the geographical center of these.

The newly acquired painting forms an excellent addition to the collection of Flemish and Dutch primitive paintings which is one of the prides of the Detroit Museum. It was shown in Detroit in the exhibition of early Dutch paintings in February, 1944,

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*Italian Gothic gilt pastiglia  
Cassone with the story of  
Jason and Medea —  
Philadelphia Museum of Art*



*Pair of Florentine Cassoni with  
the story of Demeter  
and Persephone  
Philadelphia Museum of Art*



soon after it had been brought to this country from an English collection, and again in the exhibition of *Five Centuries of Dutch Paintings* in Montreal in April, 1944.

### THREE ITALIAN CASSONI

NOTE: Six of the major items of Italian decorative art of the collection of the late Clarence Mackay and another from the collection of the late Mortimer L. Schiff have been recently acquired by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. They include the three great Urbino majolica vases by Orazio Fontana, formerly in the Charles Stein and Adolphe de Rothschild collections, the famous Italian Gothic cassone with a large heraldic lion (Schott-müller, Fig. 36, Odom, Fig. 5), and the three cassoni here discussed, also widely known and illustrated. An inquiry by the Museum of Dr. Erwin Panofsky of the Institute of Advanced Study for a verification of the legends represented in these last three evoked the following note which is here printed in all its inimitable erudition, humor and colloquialism.

—Fiske Kimball

Concerning the Medea Cassone No. 1 (Schubring: Cassoni, No. 493) I could not get hold of a photograph of the casket in Dresden to which Schubring refers, but in Schlosser's famous article about the Embriachi in *Jb.A.K.H.*, XX, 1899, there is sufficient material to go by, and we may assume that in a general way an interpretation as "The Myth of Jason and Medea" may be accepted on the strength of the inscription on the Dresden casket. However, if we try to interpret the individual scenes we run into trouble. The source of the Embriachi caskets is Benoît de Ste. More's *Roman de Troie* (or rather Guido Colonna's version of same, entitled *Historia destructionis Troiae*) which, however, does not relate the story of the daughters of Pelias (king of Iolkos in Thessalia and wicked uncle of Jason, later dismembered by his daughters whom Medea had persuaded that

they could thus rejuvenate the old gentleman). This part of the story is related in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, and in the corresponding section of the *Ovida Moralisé*. Thus, if the daughters of Pelias appear on your cassone, as I think they do, we have to be prepared for a pretty confused account based on both the Benoît and the Ovid traditions. With these reservations the scenes, reading from left to right, may be interpreted as follows: 1. The three daughters of Pelias—not the daughters of Pelias and Medea. For Medea, princess of Colchis, did not meet Jason until he had arrived there to get the Golden Fleece, and she did not meet the Peliades until she had accompanied him to his home-town Iolkos. Therefore, she could not appear in their company in a scene obviously preceding Jason's and Hercules' embarkation. 2. This embarkation is represented in the second scene which shows Jason and Hercules on the ship Argo en route to Colchis. 3. Medea, accompanied by her lady-in-waiting, gives Jason the means with which to accomplish the conquest of the Golden Fleece. These means are, according to Benoît and Guido Colonna, with characteristic medieval hyperbole, no less than five in number: a silver image (thus always in the Embriachi caskets); a salve protecting its user from the dragon; a ring which makes him invisible; a prayer; and a liquid to be cast into the mouths of the dangerous bulls (*Roman de Troie*, verses 1649-1710; Guido Colonna, p. 25-26 in N. E. Griffin's edition of 1936). In the cassone, the round object in Medea's hand may be meant to represent the ring and the peculiar thing on the ground may be a magic vessel; but this remains uncertain. 4. In the fourth scene Medea brandishes the same mysterious object and an unmistakable sword from which Jason seems to recoil. This sword plays a role in two incidents, viz., in the alleged rejuvenation (in reality murder) of Jason's wicked uncle Pelias, and in the *bona fide* rejuvenation of his good father Aeson. Aeson cannot appear at the home-coming ceremonies in Iolkos

## DUVEEN BROTHERS

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PARIS

NEW YORK



JACQUES LOUIS DAVID, *Portrait of Pierre Desmays* (35½" x 28¾")  
*Buffalo, Albright Art Gallery*

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on account of his old age, and Jason asks Medea to rejuvenate him by adding some of his own years to those of his father (Ovid, *Metam.*, VII, v. 168), whereupon she says, in effect: "No, I would not shorten your life, but I can manage otherwise." Then she proceeds to make a lot of magic hocus-pocus and finally opens Aeson's throat with a sword (v. 285: "... stricto Medea recludit Ense senis iugulum . . ."), drains his old blood and replaces it by magic liquids. This works out all right, and Medea convinces the daughter of Pelias that their old father might benefit by a similar treatment. She prepares a magic bath, but with ineffectual ingredients, and all the young ladies begin to hack Pelias to pieces, again with swords. The daughters losing heart, Medea finishes him off, throws the remains into the bath, and that is the end of Pelias (v. 437).

Now, since the rejuvenation of Aeson is actually discussed between Jason and Medea we may be inclined to consider this dialogue the subject of our fourth scene. On the other hand, since the daughters of Pelias are represented in the first relief, since Jason's comical horror seems to foreshadow the more sinister turn of events, and since both rejuvenations are performed with the same methods though altogether different results, the scene may refer to both of them and might be labeled: "Medea showing Jason the means with which to rejuvenate his father Aeson and to take revenge of his uncle Pelias."

All this, you see, remains in part conjectural.

Concerning the two other pieces, however, we are fortunately on much firmer ground. No. 2 (Tinti: *Il Mobilio Fiorentino*, Plate XCIV) represents in fact the Rape of Proserpine and No. 3, her mother, Demeter or Ceres, accompanied by Proserpine and triumphantly setting out for their annual binge of universal fructification (hence the Satyrs). The old lady had two torches, as she ought to, and the daughter behind her has one, because she was considered, from Sophocles and Euripides, as identical

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# HUDSON'S

DETROIT



PETER PAUL RUBENS, *The Tribute Money* (74 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 56 $\frac{3}{4}$ " )  
 San Francisco, M. H. de Young Memorial Museum

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with Hecate; to say that Demeter and Hecate "seek" Proserpine would seem to be nonsense, for in connection with the Demeter myth, Proserpine and Hecate are the same person.

These two themes then do not present any difficulty and in this case, I can even give you the source, much quoted throughout the Renaissance: Boccaccio, *Genealogia Deorum*, Book VIII, chapters 4 and 6 (in the Latin edition of 1511, folio 62/s, in the Venice translation of 1553, folio 135 verso-137). Here you find everything you need. In the fourth chapter, Demeter's chariot drawn by dragons, the fructification of the whole earth, and her two torches (*due facelle* in the Italian translation, *accensis facibus* in the Latin text, but this omission of the number may be accidental); in the sixth chapter the description of Pluto and his outfit. Boccaccio describes Pluto as driving a chariot with three wheels and drawn by three horses named, in the Latin text, Amatheus, Abastrus and Novius ("Curram illi insuper trium rotarum statuere: qui triga dicitur trahique illum a tribus equis voluere: amatheo scilicet et abastro et Novio"). This information, with the names still more garbled, went of course into the translations and also into Ripa's *Iconologia*, s.v. "Carro di Plutone." Boccaccio's source is Claudianus, *De raptu Proserpinae*, I, verse 284 ss. But Boccaccio had the misfortune, not only to garble the names but also to omit a whole horse (their real names are: Orphnaeus, Aethon, Nycteus, and Alastor, and Boccaccio overlooked "Orphnaeus"); the learned men of the 16th century took him duly to task for this, for instance Gyrardus, *Syntagma*, VI, col. 193, and V. Cartari, *Imagini delli Dei degl' Antichi*, Venice edition 1584, p. 141: "A costui dettero gli antichi un carro tirato da quattro ferocissimi cavalli negri, che spiravano fuoco, nominati Orfneo, Tone, Nitteo & Alastore, che tanti ne mette Claudiano, benche dica il Boccaccio che erano tre solamente & che'l carro parimente non haveva piùdi tre ruote ..."

Now, when you look at your cassone you perceive that the abduction takes place on a roller-coaster which has in fact no more than three wheels, and this is drawn not by four but by three horses. This is incontrovertible proof of what was to be expected anyway, namely, that the source can be none other than Boccaccio. Thus when you order the labels you can even name the horses, either by their Latin names as quoted above, or by their Italian names of which I give the following selection: Amatheo, Astro and Novio; or: Metheo, Adastro and Novio; or Amatheo, Abastro and Navio.

#### PORTRAIT OF PIERRE DESMAISON BY JACQUES LOUIS DAVID

The Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, has recently acquired its first important eighteenth century canvas, the *Portrait of Pierre Desmaison*, by Jacques Louis David (1748-1825). This purchase, one of the most important that the Gallery has made to date, was made possible, in part, from the proceeds of the Gallery's recent sale of art objects.

Signed and dated 1782, the portrait is a masterpiece of David's first period. Painted when he was thirty-four, it is outstanding both for its technical brilliance of execution, revealing the artist's excellent training under his master Vien, and its extraordinary presentation of a spirited, humorously cynical character in the best rationalistic tradition of French eighteenth century portraiture as practiced by such great exponents as La Tour and Chardin. While as a portrait the present canvas has some of the characteristics of the elegant rococo tradition, particularly in its sensuous warmth of color, there is in the strong pyramidal organization of the figure and in the sculptural modeling of the head and hands more than a hint of the ascetic, neo-classical style which was to mark the art of the Revolution as sponsored and dictated by David himself.

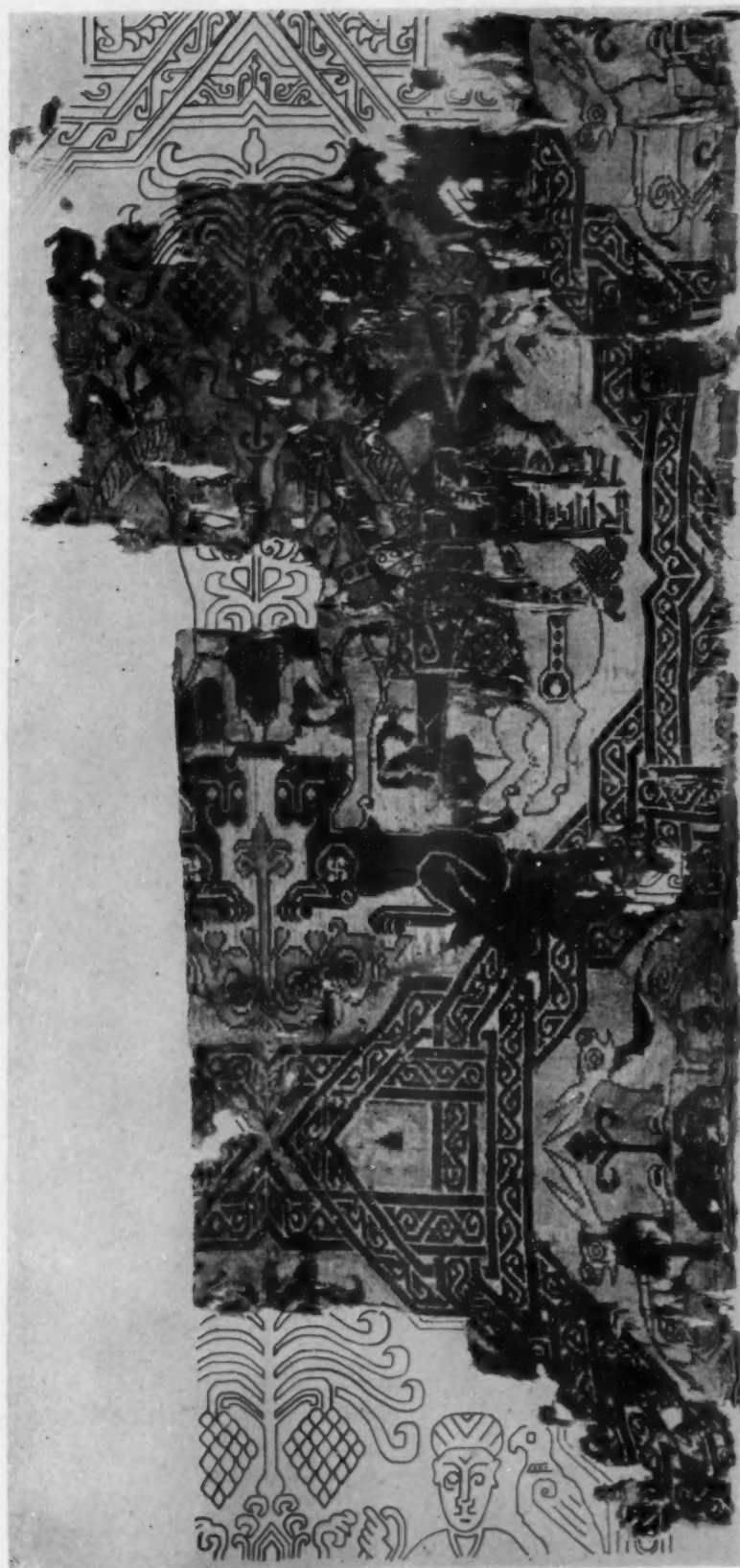
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SELJUQ PERSIA, LATE XII TO EARLY XIII CENTURY,  
*Fragment of a Tomb Cover*  
*The Detroit Institute of Arts*

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Pierre Desmaison (1724-1800) was an architect and is depicted in the portrait with some of the instruments of his profession before him, together with a volume of the *Architecture* of Palladio. He was David's uncle. He was admitted to the Academy of Architecture in 1762 and was "architecte du roi." He is best known as the architect of the galleries of the *Cour de Mai* of the *Palais de Justice*, Paris.

The portrait was formerly in the following collections: the David family, M. Baudry; M. R. . . . and M. David-Weill, Paris. It is referred to or discussed in all the significant publications on David. It was exhibited first in the Salon of 1783, and was subsequently shown in the following exhibitions: *David et ses élèves*, Paris, 1913; *David-Weill Pictures*, New York, 1937; *David and Ingres*, New York, 1940; *The French Revolution*, New York, 1943.

#### THE TRIBUTE MONEY BY PETER PAUL RUBENS

One of the most important paintings by Peter Paul Rubens to come to this country has recently been acquired by the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum of San Francisco.

*The Tribute Money*, one of the large figure canvases (74 1/4 x 56 3/4 inches) was painted in 1612 when Rubens was thirty-five years old. It shows Jesus amid eight of his disciples, one hand raised upwards as though he were repeating the phrase from Matthew's gospel where He said "And unto God the things which be God's." This is one of three versions of this subject which Rubens painted; one a trifle larger is in the Louvre, having formerly been in the Royal collection of France. The second is in the Museum of Sidney, Australia. The version just purchased by the Museum is well known, its recorded ownership goes back to 1713 when it appeared in Amsterdam in the auction of the collection of Van Loo. At that time it brought

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A documentary study of the governors' portraits in the Indiana State House, which represent thirty-seven of the thirty-eight governors of the state since its organization as a territory. Although of little artistic significance, the portraits are of considerable documentary interest for the history of the state and of its artists. A good example of how a useful publication may be made of local material of a kind usually neglected by art historians.

BROMBERG, PAUL. *Decorative Arts in the Netherlands*, New York, The Netherlands Information Bureau, 1944.

A brief, well illustrated account, with bibliography, of the modern arts and crafts movement in Holland since Birlage. Of interest to those interested in twentieth century arts and in the intelligent, creative use of a government agency to foster the arts on a basis of merit rather than charity.

## OTHER PUBLICATIONS OF THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

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£103. Subsequently it was in the collection of Lord Courtenay and at the sale of his collection at Christie's in London in 1816 it was sold to Wingfield for £514; it was later passed into the hands of John Webb and in 1831 it was in the auction of George J. Cholmondeley's collection, where it was brought by Mr. M. Emerson. It was next seen in Paris in 1841 where it was sold in the Hérès sale for 40,000 francs. It then went back to Holland a second time, when it was acquired by King William II. In the auction of his collection the painting was again purchased by an English collector, Mr. J. Dingwall, and it later passed into the hands of Miss M. A. Driver.

Besides being reproduced and catalogued in all of the works on Rubens, it has been engraved at various times by Landry, Fontana, Bruckner Visscher and Vorsterman and has been shown in such exhibitions as the British Institution, London, 1829; Manchester Art Treasures, 1857; Old Masters at the London Royal Academy, 1912.

There are few great canvases of this type in this country though there are several portraits and it is a satisfaction to know that this painting is in a permanent public collection.

Funds for the purchase came from the public auction last June of many of the Museum's surplus and duplicate objects.

### FRAGMENT OF A TOMB COVER

by Adele C. Weibel

This beautiful fragment of a tomb cover, recently acquired by the Detroit Institute of Arts through a gift of the Founders Society, is a silk fabric, triple cloth brocaded, reversible, from the Seljuq period, Persia, late twelfth to early thirteenth century.

Ribbons, ornamented with a floral tendril, are elaborately interlaced to frame compartments. The smaller of these contain crouching hares, confronted, looking backward as if scared, and a four-petaled blossom with pistils forming a flowery cross. The large compartments contain a strange design: on either side of a palmtree with pendent bunches of dates stands a cavalier, holding a falcon on one hand, the other is raised as in salutation. His pale blue horse steps daintily, one forefoot raised, the other touching a black panther with a swastika marking the muscle of the thigh.

This composition harkens back to pre-Islamic times, when the Persians were ruled by the Sassanian dynasty and believed in the dual powers of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. Clearly the shining horseman represents the Power of Good, the black monster the Power of Evil. As a design it is related to the Yezdegerd silk fabrics and many Sassanian silver bowls. But here the rider is not shown in profile, he turns toward and faces the beholder and is dressed in the fashion of around A.D. 1200, wearing a close fitting turban, knee-length tunic, high riding boots and a short sword or hunting knife. The saddle rests on a cloth patterned with a trellis containing trefoils and crosses, the straps across the horse's chest and rump seem to be set with jewels. The colors are white, dark brown and light blue.